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THE CERTAINTY OF RELIGION

THE CERTAINTY OF RELIGION

BY
FREDERICK STORRS TURNER

AUTHOR OF "KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF, AND CERTITUDE," ETC.



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PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the certainty of Religion. The attempt to fulfil this purpose will have to encounter a prejudice somewhat widely entertained, that in Religion certainty is unattainable, only probability is possible. On this account, the proffered demonstration is preceded by a chapter on the nature of Certainty. Most of us hold our certainties of all kinds—mathematical, scientific, historical, ethical, religious—each because of its own special evidence, intuitive or inferential; without ever putting to ourselves the question—what is certainty? What do we mean by the word? Practically we know very well that certainty and uncertainty or doubt are opposites; that we want to get the one and to get rid of the other. To put troublesome questions involves the danger of getting

into what seems to be a slough of Despond, called metaphysics or philosophy; wherein whosoever falls will lose his time and strength; and if he ever scrambles out will be no wiser than before. To moderate these fears I would premise that the brief investigation of certainty which follows is carried on in the spirit and after the method of science; and I venture to express the hope that it will dispel some confusions of thought, and so prepare the way for the demonstration which is the main business undertaken here. The one chapter on the nature of Certainty is a mere outline of an important but generally neglected study, which has been more fully prosecuted elsewhere.¹

If, however, the reader pleases to pass over the first chapter and begin with chapter II., he will find an argument complete in itself, not depending on the previous discussion of Certainty.

¹ In *Knowledge, Belief, and Certitude*, published by Swan Sonnenschein & Co.

The Certainty of Religion

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF CERTAINTY

IN studying astronomy we begin with the certainty that there are stars: we see them. In studying botany, we begin with the certainty that there are plants: we see them, handle them, smell them, taste them. In studying certainty, we begin with the certainty, that we are certain: we have the feeling of certainty in ourselves, we think about this certainty and seek to understand it. Certainty is not an ultimate and independent existence; but a consequent arising from other antecedent existences—stars, plants, animals, and many other beings, among which we ourselves are of prime importance. Stars and stones, land and water, vegetables and animals may conceivably exist without human minds:

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indeed the science of geology teaches us that all these kinds of being were here before thinking men appeared in the world. At the outset of our inquiry we find ourselves in possession of certainties; (1) that we ourselves are thinking, feeling beings is an original certainty; (2) that a world or environment exists around us is also an original certainty; (3) to each of us separately his own personal existence is a certainty of immediate feeling; but the existence of all other thinking minds is for each one a certainty received through impressions of vision, hearing, etc., and inferences drawn from these. Briefly, the self, other selves, and the visible and tangible world containing unnumbered different species, are three primordial fundamental certainties received naturally by all human minds in healthy growth.

Human knowledge has no known beginning. We cannot remember the first intelligent recognition, the first act of attention, in our own past history. Feelings of various kinds preceded knowledge; and beings preceded feelings; probably we ourselves lived for some time before we began to feel; certainly other beings, our parents, lived before our life began. The time-order of existence within the range of our world

is, first, beings; secondly, feelings; thirdly, volitions; fourthly, thinking. This time-order belongs to our subjective certainties only. If we think about the whole universe of beings of all kinds, we have no reason for supposing that beings without feelings, without wills, without intelligences, were in existence first of all, and that from these mindless beings all the minds were afterwards evolved.

Our common expressions for certainty are, 'I am sure of it,' 'I know it,' 'I believe it.' The first expression means the feeling; the second the intelligent apprehension of it; the third, indicates our sense of dependence upon the 'it,' the being which is known and believed. There is a vague tendency in some minds to the opinion that knowledge expresses a stronger certainty than belief; but this opinion is erroneous.¹ There are no degrees of certainty. Either we are sure, quite sure, or we are not quite sure: when we are not certain, our feeling is of probability, not of certainty. The vulgar use of the expression 'I believe,' when the accurate statement would be 'I think,' is unjustifiable. We can think two contradictions; either of which may be true, but both cannot be true: if we think one more likely

¹See Appendix, Note A.

than the other, we have a probability, it may be almost a certainty; but a certainty it is not. Probabilities are useful when certainty cannot be had. In such cases, Bishop Butler said, 'For us probability is the very guide of life.' If action is imperative, in the absence of certainty we must take the probably right course. Nevertheless, this necessity does not change probability into certainty. If the action succeeds, thus showing that probability guided us aright in that case, when similar circumstances recur, the probability would naturally be stronger than before. Repetitions of the like experience produce in us the feeling of certainty; but this is not always a true feeling. We human beings are not infallible: not only in thinking and willing but even in feeling we sometimes make mistakes.¹ Let the probability be a thousand, a million, a billion even, to one, still the one exception is there. When this exception will become present fact we cannot tell; it is extremely unlikely that the very next time we try, the exception will appear; but we cannot be certain that it will not appear. Practically in letting ourselves be guided in action by probability we act rightly and rationally; but we need not therefore illogically affirm that probability is certainty.

¹ See Appendix, Note B.

How does this recognition of our fallibility, and of the insufficiency of a limited number of experiences to guarantee an unlimited continuity, affect the three fundamental certainties already mentioned? It does not affect the certainty of self-existence in any way; because this is an immediate certainty. Our reasoning is fallible; but our feelings are not thinkings but facts. We feel each moment ourselves in a state of solitude or company, of action or of rest, or of being acted upon; we see, hear, grasp, walk, touch, push, are pressed upon; smell, taste; are pleased or displeased—not all these at every moment, but several distinguishable sensations and inner feelings may co-exist at one moment. We feel more than we can attend to at once; but in each moment something occupies the focus of our attention. This something, a sound, a colour, a pressure, a pleasure or pain, whatever it may be, is an immediate certainty. It is. We can imagine that it will pass away; but while it is, it is. In such certainties there is no room for doubt. Of all these immediate certainties the self is the most frequent: in every pain it is the self who is pained; in every pleasure it is the self who is pleased; in every vision, the self sees, and thus the self is an immediate certainty. Similarly, the

not-self, the environment is always present in every waking moment. Whether the other selves are ever immediate certainties is not quite certain. To me it seems that the first perception of other selves must have been a consequence of sounds, movements, actions, from which the presence of souls within their bodies was inferred; but later on, when the concept of other selves has become a certainty, then the communication of their thoughts to us by speech or by gestures or by writing produces a direct impression of their personality. What I infer from another's behaviour is likeness to myself—the existence of a common human nature in both of us; but sometimes the other self communicates to me thoughts and feelings which I had never experienced before. His personality, his character, his powers, are different from mine. In such cases the other self seems to produce a direct impression of himself upon myself, besides the usual impression by way of inference. At all events, the certainty of other selves is quite as strong as the certainty of self and that of the environment.

These three fundamental certainties relieve us from the difficulty of searching for the beginning of consciousness and knowledge. We cannot

attend to anything and perceive it, unless it is there, presented to us. These certainties are present existences, before we are conceived in the womb. Two, the individual self and the not-self are both present in and to the individual from the first and always; for the body is both part of the self and also is part of the eternal material system to which its physical molecules belong, these being derived therefrom and returning thereto in a perpetual influx and reflux. Each ego being thus connected with the environment, all the egos have at least this one connecting link. When mental activity is awakened, the subject-matter of its thinking is already there before the mind; and the mind by comparing and perceiving likenesses and differences, enters upon its life-long work of interpreting or understanding what is presented to consciousness. The logical or reasoning process cannot work until at least one first proposition is given to it which requires no logical proof. Philosophers and logicians have recognised this necessity; and much fruitless labour has been spent in search for first principles. But the fact that we already have certainties given to us, before reason starts upon its enterprise has not been always recognised.

As matter of actual verifiable experience we have these original *data*, as they are called, which have not to be hunted for, but are bestowed upon us beforehand. The data may also be called *recepta*; for the mind receives them as they come, naturally and necessarily; since without this acquiescence it could not think at all.

In the reception of data the mind is not liable to error; it can only receive what is given as it is given; cannot by receiving change it into something else. The mind can to some extent elect what it shall receive; for the data are numberless, and the mind can hardly attend effectively to more than one at a time. Inattention does not alter the neglected datum; that continues to be, and to reappear under its normal conditions, waiting as it were for an opportunity of arresting attention. Here we encounter a question of profoundest interest—Are the data themselves infallible? As they come to us, so we must receive them; but are they themselves steadfast and trustworthy; or do they appear to us in one character, while themselves, in reality varying in their nature? This question used to be answered with perfect confidence in common-sense and scientific thinking.

Material substances, it was said, cannot change; they are unconscious, non-living: what they are they are always and everywhere. This however is an assumption. It is true that to human experience, stones and metals, air and water, seem to have a constant nature. And whenever any quality unobserved before, is perceived in them, such as electricity, magnetism, X-rays, Becquerel rays, or any new element, argon, helium, or radium, is discovered; then science admits that it must change its affirmations, not that the natural substances are inconsistent. This certainty or constancy of matter and force is an assumption unverifiable by experience, because experience rests upon it, presupposes it; but it is a necessary assumption, because without it we could not reason about the future, and past experience would be no guide to action. Probability would not guide us, because there would be no probability; for probability rests upon certainty. Take the common instance of tossing up a half-penny; the two possibilities are found by trial to be in the long run approximately equal. But in making the trials, we believe in the constant nature of the coin. If the coin instead of being always the same were variable in unknown ways, the future behaviour

of the thing could not be conjectured from the past.

The assumption of constancy is necessary, if we are to build houses, construct ships, make tools and weapons, and in general to keep ourselves alive in the world. The late Professor Huxley recognised that this assumption really is a certain belief. 'The one act of faith,' he said, 'in the convert to science is the confession of the universality of order, and of the absolute validity at all times and under all circumstances of the law of causation. The confession is an act of faith, because by the nature of the case the truth of such propositions is not susceptible of proof. But such proof is not blind but reasonable, because it is universally confirmed by experience, and constitutes the sole trustworthy foundation of all action.'¹ This creed is as brief as creed can be, limited to one act of faith. But Huxley widened it afterwards, when he wrote: 'No induction, however broad its basis, can confer certainty in the strict sense of the word. The experience of the whole human race through innumerable years has shown that stones unsupported fall to the ground, but that does not make it certain that any day next week un-

¹ 'The Life of Darwin,' by his son. Vol. ii., p. 200.

supported stones will not move the other way. All that it does justify is the very strong expectation, which hitherto has been invariably verified, that they will do just the contrary.

‘Only one absolute certainty is possible to man—namely, that at any given moment the feeling which he has exists. All other so-called certainties are beliefs of greater or less intensity We poor mortals have to be content with hope and belief in all matters past and present—our sole certainty is momentary.’¹ So he passes from only one act of faith to faith everywhere and always, except in the momentary certainty of the immediately present feeling. The question is whether he is right in making this one exception. Incontestably the present feeling exists, and it is a certainty; but mere existence is not certainty. I am now writing in this room with pen, paper, ink, and books before me. Huxley was writing and had his momentary feelings as he penned the sentences quoted. But this whole feeling of writing down one’s thoughts is a complex feeling which is not merely momentary; the feeling of the self contained in it belongs to the past; the

¹“Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley.” Vol. ii., p. 262.

feeling that one writes for others to read, points to the absent, the distant, the future. All these depend upon belief—are beliefs. In dreams, we have feelings, which when we wake, we do not believe.

I submit, then, that we have no absolute knowledge; that all our certainties are beliefs, that certainty is belief. In reception, we believe what is given to us; in perception we believe that that part of the given to which we attend has a constant nature, is real and trustworthy. In conception, we believe that our mental judgments are true and trustworthy when they are verified in trial and confirmed by the experience of others. Our concepts, however, are always partial and inadequate; therefore knowledge is always imperfect. Knowledge is never true when it pretends to be absolute. Belief is always true and trustworthy when it does not rest upon our own necessarily imperfect judgments; but passes beyond these to trust utterly and absolutely in the one infinite and eternal Being, who is the One and the All, incomprehensible to our finite intelligence but accessible to our humble faith.

We can now answer our question as to the infallibility of the not-self. First, in common

sense and science the material world is conceived as composed of non-living matter, incapable of the irregular behaviour which we observe in the higher living things; it does not deceive us because it cannot. That answer is good enough for a mechanical universe; it assures us of the universality of causation which physical science needs as its first principle. But, secondly, the whole real universe contains thinking and willing beings who can act from their own inward impulses, and thus are not confined within the law of a causation external to themselves. In their lives also there are antecedents and sequents, but the antecedents are alternatives, offering a choice of two or more courses of action; and the thinking being exercises this power to choose, wisely or foolishly, rightly or wrongly, seeking his own good only, or seeking also the good of others. Even with regard to the material universe we do not know that it is unconscious, and lifeless; for we do not know the ultimate nature of matter; nor of anything.

Our intellect cannot frame an adequate concept of the whole infinite, eternal Being; and therefore is incompetent to formulate a judgment upon it. But this inconceivability and

incompetence do not cut us off from the whole; we feel what we do not adequately imagine, we trust what we cannot logically define. And it is this trust alone which makes our life possible. We have not to begin by inquiring—is it right to believe? Belief is as natural to us as breathing and eating. Our bodily and mental growth are attained by processes which are based upon faith. ‘Literally, “we walk by faith, not by sight.” Every step we take on city pavement, or country road, or grassy hill-side, we take by faith. We cannot *see* the solidity of the ground upon which we are about to set foot: solidity is not *visible*. We cannot feel that the road in front of us will bear our weight; for we are not yet standing upon it. Step after step, we walk on in perfect certitude, because we believe in the constancy of that association of solidity with visible appearances to which we have been accustomed to trust in the past. Just as literally, in common knowledge and the sciences, every mental judgment is an act of faith in the trustworthiness of the data of consciousness, in the validity of inference, in the reality of the object. There is no other way of knowledge. Apart from this faith we can have no knowledge at all. Trust in the reality is the real nature of knowledge, and

the reality itself is the guarantee of its validity.' *

The unity and the difference of belief and knowledge should now be clear to our minds. We are apt to suppose that two words must always stand for two things ; but that is an error. Knowledge and belief are like a string in which two threads are intertwined ; we have names for the two threads, but we have no name for the string. Nor does the metaphor hold good entirely—because two threads may be separated, and each be a string ; but belief and knowledge cannot be separated. Every atom of knowledge consists of belief ; but some parts of our knowledge can be expressed in words, with sufficient exactness to give a useful description of the known thing. All beliefs contain some knowledge, for in every case we can indicate what it is that we trust. The certainty of knowledge and belief is belief in the infinite, the indescribable, the incomprehensible, the One and the All. This belief is natural, necessary, rational, and right. It is natural, for we are born into it ; it is necessary, for we cannot help believing ; without constant exercise of belief we

* 'Knowledge, Belief, and Certitude,' page 477.

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should die ; it is rational, for by believing we acquire knowledge and wisdom and happiness ; and it is right, for unbelief leads to insanity, to misery, to wickedness ; according as it operates in the intellectual, social, and moral fields.

CHAPTER II

ETHICAL CERTAINTY

IT is convenient to consider morality separately and in the first place, because there are those who call themselves agnostics, whose ethical certainty is clear and strong, although to them religion seems obscure and doubtful. But we must guard ourselves against the appearance of admitting that their position is defensible. In reality, morality and religion are one and inseparable; for both are included in the one feeling called duty; both are real, because the feeling of duty towards the invisible and incomprehensible Being or beings, called God or the gods, rests upon man's real relation to this Being or these beings, which is none the less real because by some it is not realized; and the feeling of duty towards man, if it can hardly be altogether unfelt by any, is also an ideal which is rarely or never perfectly realized.

Goodness is not less real, because some men are wicked, because the best of us are prompt to confess that they are not perfectly good. Some men are blind but not deaf; others are not blind but are deaf; yet the normal man has both eyesight and hearing. So there are moral men whose feeling of personal and social duty is keen and strong, who are defective in religious feeling; while on the other hand sincerely religious people sometimes fail in morality. In actual fact, morality and religion are both real and ideal. They really exist as qualities in human nature, as motive powers which affect character and conduct; at the same time as thus existing here and now, they are accompanied by a sense of shortcoming, by a mental vision of an ideal character and conduct not yet fully realized.

Thus the truly moral man, just so far as he is moral, is to that extent religious; though he may not recognise it, his morality is really an effect of his relation to the whole, and to the powers which underlie, sustain and rule the whole. And the religious man, just so far as he is immoral, is to that extent deficient in true religion. Briefly, imperfection is really existent, and it is true and good so far as it goes, true also so far as it is aware that it is not perfection.

Perfection is an ideal set before us as our goal ; and is real in the whole eternal Being which sets the goal before us, and produces in us self-condemnation for our shortcoming, and desire for nearer approximation to the ideal.

The distinction of right and wrong is the fundamental certainty of ethics. The feeling of the distinction is universal in normally developed human nature. Babies have no moral sense, but neither have they as yet any active intelligence nor any conscious volition. It may be admitted that there is possibly or even probably a stage of evolution in which desire and intelligence co-operating produce conscious self-interest before a distinct recognition of right and wrong arises.

Be that so or not, there is no doubt that when once right and wrong have been felt, these feelings differentiate themselves as not mere pleasure and pain, but pleasure and pain with a new quality superadded. The feeling of right having been chosen is pleasant, and the self-condemnation for a wrong choice is painful ; but rightness and pleasantness are not the same feeling ; they are two feelings which may be combined in one and the same state of consciousness, but also may be, and not seldom are, opposed also in one and the same state of consciousness.

A hungry man eats, impelled by dislike of the pain of hunger and desire for the pleasure of taste and satiety—his action is non-moral. But in the very act of eating, or before it, in the seeking for food, he may be impelled by the thought of other duties which he will not be able to fulfil unless he eats to maintain his bodily strength and mental energy. Self-interest thus passes into prudence, which may be only an enlightened self-interest, or it may be a virtue because it contains a feeling of moral obligation.

Further, the feeling of relation to others may lead the hungry man to stint himself in order to feed them—a self-sacrifice familiar in the homes of the poor. And this self-sacrifice led a dying Sir Philip Sydney to turn from the longed-for water in favour of another sufferer; and how often it has led parents to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children, no one can tell. Utilitarians recognise distinctions of quality in pleasure, which is nothing else than the combination therewith of something which is other and better than pleasure.

We are now face to face with the crisis of the argument. Right and wrong are different from and superior to pleasure and pain. They are real motives to action, real guides to conduct, real

forces which produce results, both in the physical and psychical spheres. If a man does not feel this, and know it with assurance of its truth and reality, it is vain to reason with him—we who have the certainty can only look upon him as we look upon the higher animals. He may be inoffensive as a sheep, or bloodthirsty as a wolf; but he lacks the moral sense which a naturally-developed man possesses. So long as our intelligent activity is directed only to the material world of non-living matter, studying changes of place among masses of matter, the moral sense is not called into action. In mechanics, the action which gains our end is wise, the useless action is foolish: there is no morality involved. If the terms right and wrong are employed, this is merely metaphorical usage. In some cases metaphor is turned the other way: the straight road being the shortest, and other things being equal, the quickest for reaching the goal, the morally right is called the straight course. Setting mere metaphors aside, when we pass from mechanics to mental and social life, we perceive altogether new motives. If the food which will satisfy my hunger belongs to another man, and I am tempted to snatch it by force, or to steal it secretly, then I am divided against

myself, I become my own judge, and I discern in the case before me something which is not mechanical, not merely biological, something which is immaterial, which belongs to the essence of my spiritual nature.

The Chinese sage Mencius said—‘I like fish, and I also like bear’s paws. If I cannot have the two together, I will let the fish go, and take the bear’s paws. So I like life, and I also like righteousness. If I cannot keep the two together, I will let life go and choose righteousness If among the things which man likes, there were nothing which he likes more than his own life, why should he not use every means by which he could preserve it? If among the things which a man dislikes, there were nothing which he dislikes more than death, why should he not do everything by which he could avoid danger? Therefore, men have that which they like more than life, and that which they dislike more than death. They are not men of distinguished talents and virtue only who have this mental nature. All men have it; what belongs to such men is simply that they do not lose it.’¹ It would not be easy to find in heathen literature

¹ ‘Legge’s Translation of The Chinese Classics.’ Vol. ii., p. 287.

a better testimony to man's normal sense of right and wrong.

Ethical certainty does not depend upon testimony: it is not affected by the counting of heads. Actually, it seems to be supported by universal assent. No age, no race, no nation, no tribe, can be indicated where the moral sense is unknown. No class of society is without it; not even the criminal class: there is 'honour among thieves,' and even murderers despise a coward and a traitor. But the certainty is not diminished, even if we are not sure of the support of universal assent. Should a man seriously assert to me that two and two make five, and that the visible shape of the sun is to him a square, not a circle, my certainty that two and two make four, that the sun is round, not square, would not be disturbed—no, nor if thousands or millions shouted their agreement with him. One single seeing man would trust the sight of his own eyes, untroubled by a world of blind people. The certainty of right and wrong is a fact of consciousness, just as the certainty of pleasure and pain, and of truth and falsehood, is fact of consciousness. Who will call in question the equality in strength of these three certainties, unless it be to affirm that the certainty of right and wrong is the strongest of the three?

That the certainty of right and wrong is stronger than that of pleasure and pain is proved by the fact that thousands of martyrs and millions of soldiers have chosen death by lingering torture rather than forsake the path of truth and duty. And even those whose courage has failed on the field or at the stake, exhibit their sense of the superior certainty of the claim of right by the ineffaceable sense of shame which haunts them. The comparison between truth and falsehood on the one hand and right and wrong on the other is more doubtful: for veracity is itself a species of right, and falsehood a species of wrong. Yet veracity is rather intellectual than moral, if it were possible to separate these two activities of our spiritual being. A bad man may be eminent for his devotion to truth in science; and a good man may uphold what is false in fact through ignorance or stupidity. Again, a wicked man, if he is strong enough to defy his critics, may take an evil delight in telling the truth about his own wickedness. However, truth and right cannot be disunited; and it is quite sufficient that the certainty of right and wrong is at least as strong as any other certainty.

I am not trying to convince the reader of the certainty of right and wrong by testimony or by

logic. If he requires to be convinced, his case is hopeless. The real and only ground for believing this certainty is that we do believe it; that the belief is in us as a part of our very being; that it is to us not an abstract or general truth but a concrete mental fact in our own personal experience. From the days of Socrates until now there always have been materialists to whom visible and tangible things seem more real than spiritual things. 'They literally grasp in their hands rocks and oaks; of these they lay hold and obstinately maintain that the things only which can be touched or handled have being or essence.'¹ Why should rocks or oaks be more real than the living minds which apprehend them? And our minds being real, these feelings of right and wrong, which, even more than pleasure or pain, affect the well-being and healthy growth of human nature, cannot be less certain than the unconscious things we see and touch. So it seems to me, but each man must judge for himself. Have I this clear, strong, and deep feeling of the certainty of right and wrong? Have you this feeling with like steadfastness and intensity? If we have the feeling we shall need no argument for it. If we have it not, no argument will avail to produce it.

¹ Jowett's *Plato*, vol. iv., p. 376.

Nevertheless these pages have, I hope, served their purpose. It is an observable fact that we may have certainties, act upon them, live by them, and yet, simply through inattention we may not be aware that we have them. This inattention is not necessarily blameworthy. Some of us may be naturally so strongly inclined to all that is right and good, so habitually averse to all that is wrong and vile, as rarely to feel any inward struggle to be faithful to the good instinct and to repress evil tendencies. In such persons the strength of their certainty is proved by their very unconsciousness of it; as in our common sense daily life all of us have and act upon physical certainties continually, without ever once saying to ourselves 'I am sure of this.' Perfect certainty easily drops out of consciousness, while the conduct in accordance with it shows that it exists. Such persons however are liable to be painfully shocked if they are suddenly startled by a challenge to their certainty from without, perhaps by one who not having the certainty himself, honestly challenges it in others. In ages of conflict and mental unrest, it is desirable that all who are exposed to such attacks should be acquainted with their own certainties by self-examination. When the time of trial comes, they

will be able to speak with their enemy in the gate.

On the other hand, inattention may be not an intellectual but a moral defect. We may be unconscious of a profound internal conviction of right and wrong, because we have not lived our life in accordance with it. If internal protests against yielding to pleasant vices and shrinking from obvious but onerous duties are frequently hushed and hurried out of sight, the mental certainty is weakened, and may gradually be destroyed, 'seared as with a hot iron.' Well is it for us, if we are roused to a keen interest in the truth of this subject, before the deadening process is complete. Doubt is better than the certainty of spiritual death. All our certainties depend upon our experience: not only upon experience, but still upon experience as recipient of the impressions which the data of the not-self and of other selves make upon us. If we are without experience of ethical certainty, as the born-blind are without experience of visible certainty, there is no help for it; but if our lack of experience is due to wilful neglect of opportunity, then a warning voice may possibly awaken attention ere it is too late.

A brief reference must be made to ethical

uncertainty. Leslie Stephen pointed out that there is little difficulty in determining what is right and its opposite wrong; but 'if we ask, what is the essence of right and wrong? how do we know right from wrong; why should we seek the right and eschew the wrong? we are presented with the most contradictory answers.'¹ The general reply to this difficulty wherever we meet it is the same. We are not omniscient; we are not infallible; in every field of thought we meet with uncertainties; but in no case does an uncertainty invalidate a certainty. In moral as in intellectual beliefs the same rule holds good. The certainty of the multiplication table comes under no faintest shadow of doubt, because the mathematician cannot tell us the exact value of the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. We are certain that the sun appears to us to move round the earth, also that the earth really moves round the sun; and these certainties are in no degree impaired by our uncertainty whether there is or is not a great central sun round which our solar system revolves.

There are uncertainties in ethics, 'chiefly' as Leslie Stephen says 'in the details and special application of generally admitted principles.'

¹ 'The Science of Ethics,' page 1.

In regard to these, we have reason to be thankful that they are comparatively so rare. Nearly always we have not the slightest doubt as to what our duty is; in the actual cases of doubt, frequently we can postpone action until more light comes; there remain the cases in which immediate action is imperative. The tramp on the highway begs for a penny—ought I to give or not to give? The demand for payment of rates is made—ought I to pay, or to refuse payment because I have reason to fear that some of the money will be put to a wrong use? In these cases where we are uncertain, we must admit our uncertainty, and comfort ourselves with the thought that, since we sincerely desire to do the right if only we could know it, our error, if we fall into error, is intellectual rather than moral.

Leslie Stephen's three questions do not seem to be formidable. The *essence* of right and wrong. What did he mean by 'essence?' Essence is just being: right is right and wrong is wrong. When we are certain that we know the right and its opposite, the wrong, we need not trouble our brains about essences and substances and causes! Concrete rights and wrongs come to us in particular situations, as immediate facts of consciousness with the moral imperative 'thou

shalt,' or 'thou shalt not.' When a man's house is on fire, he does not stop to wonder what is the essence of fire; he sets to work to put the fire out; or to save his family and himself from the flames. 'How do we know right from wrong?' As we know light from darkness, cold from heat, by immediate perception. 'Why should we seek the right and eschew the wrong?' Because right is right, and wrong is wrong.

Yet behind all these three questions, there is the great mystery of the universe, of the unity or duality of all existence; the mystery which is the unsolved problem of philosophy, and which philosophy will never solve, as it seems to me. Religion has to do with this mystery. Leslie Stephen was, or thought that he was, agnostic in religion; hence he could find no help in that direction. We shall presently consider religion for ourselves.

CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS CERTAINTY

CERTAINTIES are classified according to the subject-matter to which they refer; we speak of common sense certainty, mathematical certainty, scientific certainty, historical certainty, ethical certainty, religious certainty. The mental state is the same in kind and in meaning, whatever it refers to; we feel sure, we have no doubt; we accept the verbal proposition which expresses this state as true, and as a trustworthy guide to action, whenever it is applicable to action. Each thinker feels that his certainties are all equal in truth and in strength; though he takes more lively interest in some than in others. For example, our own personal being is a certainty of the greatest possible interest to each of us; mathematical certainties seem dry and cold, true of course, but not exciting emotionally; scientific and historical certainties vary, some are very

interesting, others do not move us. Ethical certainty touches us all very nearly. Religious certainty, on the contrary, while to some the strongest, deepest, most sacred and precious of all, is to others of inferior interest, and to a few, at least, as they think, of no interest at all.

Certainties vary in the degree to which they receive the confirmation of general agreement, or as it is commonly but less accurately called, universal assent. Ethical certainty stands high in this respect. We are all of us affected by the ethical character of others, and by their opinion of our ethical character; and from continual action and re-action an approach to a common standard of morals is reached: though differences exist in the details and practical carrying out of moral rules in different places, ages, and classes of society. The intellectual embarrassment which these variations in moral codes would otherwise cause is relieved, if not altogether dispelled, by the manifest fact that both individuals and societies are undergoing a process of evolution, not all at the same rate of speed. The same explanation operates to mitigate the unhappy effect of religious differences and antagonisms. Nevertheless one cannot deny that religious certainty receives less support from general

agreement than ethical certainty. The agnostic, and the mere worldly man, often sarcastically point to the many different religions as a sufficient justification for not thinking about religion at all. 'Agree among yourselves first,' they say, 'then come and preach to us.'

This provokes a sigh, though the believer's own personal certainty is not diminished. He too perhaps was once blind; at all events, he now sees. But though firm in his own faith, what can he say to justify himself to others? Must not his position appear unreasonable to the great world of unbelievers? Is it not more probable that he is the subject of illusions, than that nearly the whole world is blind to self-evident truth? To these questions we reply, that they are grave misrepresentations of the actual facts. The immense majority of men are, and were in the past, religious, and their religion was and is to them certainly true.¹ And this argument may be pressed home upon the sceptical minority. Look at the facts: see those mighty domes, those stately cathedral towers, the village churches, the ugly meeting-houses, the way-side shrines, the crucifixes in the streets and in the fields. Note the time spent in religious exercises, the effect it

¹ See Appendix, Note C.

has in family and social life; the friendships it causes, the joys it brings, the sorrows it consoles. Mark its place in history, in politics, past and present; the persecutions, the martyrdoms, the religious wars. Is that a mere nothing, an empty illusion, an aberration of vain desire, a cause of needless dread, which has worked, and is still working so mightily, in every nation and tribe, in every continent and island? No; a man of truly scientific mind must admit that religion is a subject which deserves his most earnest and patient investigation. If he has not the slightest sympathy with it in his personal feeling, still as an external, world-wide, age-long fact of colossal dimensions, it should excite his interest to eager inquiry. If he can perceive nothing in it to repay his attention, does it not seem probable that there is some defect in him to account for this? It is more likely that he is not quite normally developed than that the whole course of evolution should have gone astray until now.

Yet I would not count upon his study of external signs of religion as sure to lead him to a change of opinion. It ought to suffice to silence rash assertions and contemptuous sarcasm; but as to convincing him that religion is true, it could go no farther than to induce him to consider the

subject as worthy of attention and study. If the whole matter remained external to him, if he found no trace of religious feeling in himself, no sympathy whatever with its impressions and its aspirations, then his investigation might end in bewilderment, but hardly in religious belief. The bed-rock upon which all certainty is based is experience: no experience, no certainty is the invariable law. And experience always rests upon given facts as its ultimate foundation; these given facts, partly physical, partly psychical being the antecedents and the causes of all experience.

Neither the popular, nor the scientific, nor the philosophical mind, seems to have fully grasped and practically realised this nature of the foundation of all truth and certainty. Plain people, the men in the street, are too busy, and too modest to meddle with fundamental truth. They have certainties enough and to spare, physical, ethical, religious—some more, some fewer—but all have enough to guide their action in perhaps nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine cases out of every thousand in which action is necessary. In the thousandth case, they rather seek for help to direct them in that particular case, than begin by going back to the foundations of all truth. But only think of the knowledge we actually possess—

take up any kind or part of knowledge whatever, and consider what it rests upon ; if we think long enough and attentively enough, we always perceive that we get our knowledge by experience ; and our experience by accepting the certainties which come to us.

Astronomy is an illustration at hand : it begins with the first letter of the alphabet ; it is, I suppose, the most exact of the sciences ; it has the most wonderful verifications ; it occupies the cleverest mathematicians ; while children and savages easily acquire the elements of the science. What are the ultimate bases of astronomy ? Two facts of experience ; first, that we have eyes to see, secondly that sun, moon and stars are visible to us. Either of these is a possible or conceivable fact without the other. As some are born blind, so all might have been blind : in that case the sunrise would mean to them only warmth, and night a chilly time compared with day. On the other hand, we can conceive a world of seeing people ; and no visible celestial bodies. As it is, a curtain of clouds without a break often hides the skies for many days and nights. Imagine that cloudy envelope to surround the earth perpetually, there would be day and night, summer and winter, but no visible

sun, moon or stars—there would be no astronomy. It is not enough that things exist, we must have faculties to apprehend them; and it is not enough to have senses that can apprehend, there must be things to be apprehended; or there would be no certainty of an envioning world such as we now have.

Take another case which seems at first sight not to fall within the experience of most of us—prussic acid is a poison; to swallow a mouthful of it would produce instantaneous death. This is a certainty. We all believe it perfectly; and the mere imagination of such an act produces a shudder. But who of us has so much as seen a phial labelled with the words, ‘prussic acid?’ No one, I suppose, except doctors, chemists, and a few others connected with them. Whence then our perfect belief? It is produced by human testimony. It falls within our immediate experience that human beings do communicate facts to us by means of words; that such facts are afterwards verified in our own experience; that though men sometimes tell lies wilfully, at other times through stupidity, there is a general consensus of testimony which in the absence of all motive to deception, warrants our perfect confidence. The poisonous property of prussic acid

is attested by so many disconnected witnesses that it is believed as surely as that fire burns.

Historical certainty also depends upon immediate experience—though remotely, through many intermediate links. We begin in the here and now, and remember events in our own past; other events which we have forgotten are occasionally recalled to our recollection by the words of others, or by writings of our own hands. Then the fact of successive generations: grandfathers living and then dead, fathers also; thus we expect our own death and a world here in which we may have no part. The way in which traditions of the long past are brought to our own ears is realised. Thus the assassination of Julius Cæsar is an historical certainty, though the majority of us have never seen a man stabbed to death.

In religious certainty we expect the same rule to hold good; we expect to find that it rests upon our own immediate experience, directly or indirectly; and that this experience rests upon real facts and existences, real persons, things, and events. Unbelievers challenge this; they admit that subjective religious feelings exist; that human beings believe in the existence of a God or gods; that this belief produces or results from fears and hopes; from inability to account

for the visible world without acknowledgment of a First Cause; and so forth. But they question or deny the real existence of a supreme being. They class the belief in God with the beliefs in ghosts, fairies, and hobgoblins.

Belief in the gods of heathenism has already died out in the more civilised nations; the belief in God is doubted by many of the learned and scientific; and some of these predict that in a more or less remote future this belief will also fade away and cease to be. And they base their expectation on the alleged fact that there is nothing at all in our immediate personal experience to produce such a belief. But is not this an error on their part? Inasmuch as each experience is directly known only by one individual, we cannot pronounce upon the contents or the absence of anything from their experience. All we can do is to examine, and when possible, to give expression to our own.

Now the normal human experience seems to me to contain what we call sensations, which are receptions of impressions, feelings such as pleasure and pain, desire and fear, which are consequences of these, and conceptions which point to but do not perfectly represent realities partly but not wholly manifested in the impressions. Of these

the nearest and strongest is that of the ego or self. The self is present in every experience, and when attention is drawn thereto is as certain as any of its feelings ; but the self as a whole living reality is not manifested, is not seen ; it is believed and conceived. Having this concept once formed, the self is conceived as the bearer of its various experiences ; and thus to some extent the explanation of some of the experiences. Another group of our experiences clusters round the concept of other minds or souls embodied as ours are. There still remains that third part of our experience which refers to what each one calls, the external world. And this third part, the external world, seems to hold within itself all the individual selves—on their material side, at least. Now what is the bearer, or the unity, or the underlying ground and reason of the world ? The human intellect may never reflect deeply enough to reach this question ; but when it is once put, there must be some answer. This external world and ourselves may be called the whole of things, or the totality of being—and this is reality, the One and the All—the impression of which upon the human soul is irresistible. Whether this totality and unity of all beings is conceived of as one God, or as many gods ; as

above and wholly different from the world of phenomena; or as being in this phenomenal world or rather as having the phenomenal world within itself,—however we conceive or essay to conceive it, the reality itself is partly manifested to us by the phenomenal world, but as a whole is inconceivable by us. The higher pantheism, as Tennyson called it, is an ever present, never comprehended, reality—

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—
Are not these, O soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?

Is not the Vision He?

The suggestion that there is nothing in the reality which causes the religious feeling is untenable; in fact, everything taken together with everything else is the cause we seek for. When things are dealt with separately in definable groups, we get common knowledge and sciences, which consist of finite judgments, holding good under special conditions. When we contemplate, or try to contemplate all things taken together, we are incompetent to form judgments: we can only feel dependence, wonder, awe, fear, gratitude, trust, love. These feelings are the basis of religion.

The definition of religion is the belief in a Being or a number of Beings to which the

religious feelings refer. It involves a certainty, namely, the real existence of the Being called God, or of the beings called gods ; or of the real existence of both one Supreme God, and a number of inferior and subordinate deities.

CHAPTER IV

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

As facts of conscious experience, our religious feelings are certainties, as certain as our moral feelings; and both these kinds of feeling are as certain as our feelings of sight and touch, taste and smell, hearing and temperature. Like all other contents of consciousness, the religious feelings produce effects in conduct and in character: we have therefore both an immediate and an inferential certainty of the truth of the religious feelings. Moreover, like all other genuine feelings, the religious feelings are confirmed by verification. The feelings produce desires, the desires lead to purposes; the purposes call forth efforts, and the efforts have success—not always, but sometimes—and the successes are verifications. Religion actually makes us wiser, better, nobler, happier than we were without it. Subjectively, religious certainty

falls behind no other in its strength, and in the satisfaction which it gives.

Objectively, at first sight there seems to be a difference. In our daily life of common-sense, the visible and tangible things with which we have to do appear to us to be indubitable realities. They are solid, irresistible, forcing themselves upon our belief even against our desire, and volition. When we drop burning sealing wax on our hand, or plunge into ice-cold water on a winter morning, our sensations are subjective, but their causes are objectively present and immediately certain. Ethical certainty also has its objects in our fellow-creatures who are corporeally present to our eyes and ears and hands. A man is not so hard as a brick wall; but the certainty of his objective existence is as strong or stronger, for the wall cannot hurt us if we have nothing to do with it, while the man without provocation or solicitation may be able to aid or injure us. In a word, the external world including other selves is an objective certainty. This holds good for idealists as well as for materialists, seeing that to both the nature of matter is unknown; it may be mind-stuff or dream-stuff; if so it is not a merely subjective dream, but an objective dream imposed on us

from outside, a constant law-abiding dream not caused by us, not capricious and illogical as most of our private dreams are. The certainty, then, of the world including the selves in it, is objective as well as subjective. But is God an objective certainty to our perceptions? This great and grave question is not to be answered off-hand.

God is not a visible and tangible object, one among the many objects which occupy space. From of old men have desired such an objective presence of the Deity.

‘Oh that I knew where I might find him,
That I might come even to his seat.
Behold I go forward but he is not there,
And backward but I cannot perceive him,
On the left hand, when he doth work, but I cannot
behold him,
He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see
him.’¹

In this sense, ‘no man hath seen God at any time;’² he dwelleth ‘in the light that no man can approach unto.’³ Our bodily senses cannot perceive God; therefore, to those who have no spiritual feeling of His presence, it may seem that men have only an imagination of God, and thence

¹ Job xxiii. 3, 8.

² John i. 18.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

they may go on to suspect that it is an imagination of what does not exist, like the imaginations of fairies, centaurs, mermaids, etc. Yet they should pause, for we have only an imagination or concept of the human soul, our very self. This is not discernible by the bodily eyes, cannot be grasped by human hands; and this has been accounted by some agnostics an unreality, an epiphenomenon, without substance, without genuine being. We can perceive clearly that the soul of man, his true self, is the unity and permanence of his being; it does not appear wholly and completely in any one moment of consciousness, because it is greater than the successive moments which are its passing experiences. We have no perfect concept of the self, but we have a perfect certainty of the existence of the self. Similarly, we have no perfect concept of God; but we may have a perfect certainty of the existence of God.

Moreover, the assertion that the Deity is altogether outside and unconnected with the visible material universe is an error of inattention and insensibility. Pantheism, the theory that the All is God, and that nothing exists which is not part of God may be not perfect truth; but surely it is far nearer the truth than atheism. Atheism is irrational, for it implies that the atheist is

omniscient. Pantheism, on the contrary, is not unreasonable, for it finds in God the substance, the cause, the law, the order of everything in the universe. We can, and some do, believe that God is All and in All; and our theory will only be erroneous and unworthy of the Infinite and Eternal Being if we think that our imperfect finite conception of the All is the real All. We may not identify the tiny corner of the universe which falls within our experience, and is not perfectly understood, with the Being of whom it is to us a manifestation. On the other hand, as the glance of the eyes, the sound of the voice, the gestures and movements of a human body are to us revelations of the human soul; so the lightning flash, and the rising sun, the midnight stars, and the lilies of the field, are physical manifestations to our bodily senses of the invisible Spirit which forms, sustains, and rules the universe. In these we have an objective revelation of God.¹

Further, our concept of God is not a private possession of the individual mind. It came to each one of us from other minds. It is a *traditional* concept. This secures us against the suspicion that some aberration of our own mind gave rise to the conception. Not all traditional

¹ See Appendix, Note D.

beliefs are legitimate. The progress of knowledge has to a large extent consisted in rejecting concepts which satisfied our fathers, and replacing them by the results of fresh investigation. On the other hand, suspicion of the traditional which arises from this experience must not be allowed to produce the impression that the beliefs of past ages are probably false. Our ancestors also were rational beings: wisdom and truth did not begin to be when we were born. The concept of God has undergone a process of evolution, from polytheism to monotheism, from a crude anthropomorphic to a purely spiritual idea. Its evolutionary and traditional character is a support of its validity. Until further evolution gives us a manifestly superior notion, the concept of the Infinite and Eternal Being, the source and sustainer and ruler of all things holds the field of thought. Inadequate at the best, it is not impossible that it may be made somewhat fuller than it is; but it will always remain inadequate, because the finite mind cannot compass an adequate thought of God. When it was a novel theory, evolution dazzled and blinded some minds which proposed it as a substitute for God. But evolution is a process, not a substantive being; it is a mode of action which requires an agent.

The concept of God is not only traditional, it is also *intuitive*: that is, although we did not originate the concept, but received it from the minds of our progenitors, we were capable of receiving it intelligently. When they spoke of God as Creator, as Father, and so forth, there was a response in our minds which put meaning into their words; and it may be possible for us to describe the feeling which responded. 'Religion,' said Max Müller, 'if it is to hold its place as a legitimate element in our consciousness must, like all other knowledge, begin with sensuous experience.' This is liable to be misunderstood. Sensuous experience precedes thinking, and gives us the objects of our earliest thoughts; but it is not this sort of sensuous experience which suggests the thought of the Divine Being. It is rather the unsatisfactoriness of sensuous experience which sets the mind on seeking after God. And this seems to have been Max Müller's meaning also; for he said—'There is no limit which has not two sides, one turned towards us, the other turned towards what is beyond.'¹ It is this 'Beyond' which he regarded as the germ-thought of religion. This concept of a Beyond—a Being, a Power, beneath and above all the visible universe, is an

¹ 'Natural Religion,' pages 114, 123.

intuition, or immediate feeling, new and fresh in every mind, caused by some aspect of the universe itself—not by the mere words of other men, describing their feelings. It is by this intuitive feeling in ourselves that we interpret the traditional concept communicated to us by our parents and teachers. Who has not at times had a feeling, a deep and strong impression, that his sensations, his perceptions, his thoughts, at their widest range, do not extend to the whole of reality, that always and everywhere there is a Beyond which he cannot reach unto? Anything, a daisy in the grass, a speck of light in the sky, the smallest visible star, a hair or a dewdrop, is enough to start from—we are carried into the illimitable, when we try to understand it. Those who explore the stellar regions with the telescope, and study diatoms and snow-crystals with the microscope, alike find themselves powerless to fathom the eternities and immensities, before and behind, beneath and above, where abides invisible the One who is ‘over all, through all and in all.’¹ What the Infinite is, we know not—but we *feel* that it is there, near and far, always and everywhere, within and beyond the finite, the unknown God. Not to the baffled intellect alone, but also to the happy emotion of

¹ Ephesians iv. 6.

beauty and the solemn sense of awe, does the invisible Presence manifest itself—at eventide when one solitary star shines in the translucent depths of heaven; in spring when the first green buds of the hedgerow miraculously unfold; in the deep silence of night when we lie sleepless, and the bodily senses are almost totally inactive; or it may be at the sight of a child's happiness, or in some blessed experience of a pure human love. The life which contains no memories of such intuitions of God must have been unusually blinded by fleshly appetites, or extremely hardened by the struggle for wealth, power, or fame.

If there is any man who is wholly destitute of religious experiences, it is not to be expected that the above reasoning will convince him of the existence of God. Since Kant, it has been recognized that man cannot by pure reason construct a demonstration of the Divine Being. The Deity is, as theology teaches, incomprehensible by finite intelligence. The meaning of this, however, has not always been perceived. Surely the impotence of man's intellect to define and explain God carries within itself the truth that man is incompetent to frame judgments upon God and His works. Overlooking this side of human finiteness has, perhaps, been the occasion of more religious presumption

and bigotry, in some minds, and of more mental distress and perplexity in other minds, and also of more scepticism and atheism in yet other minds, than any other single difficulty, or it may be than all other difficulties put together. Because the Deity is incomprehensible, that is, inconceivable in an adequate and perfect notion, man necessarily and rightly conceives God in the only way he can, namely, in the anthropomorphic way—calling him Creator, Designer, King, Judge, Father, names which primarily belong to human beings. To think of God thus is inevitable; the only alternative is not to think of Him at all; but to forget that these conceptions are inadequate, are not all the truth of God's being, is disastrous. 'God is not a man.'¹ 'His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways.'² If we insist upon our imperfect conception of the Deity as though He were exactly a human mind and will on an infinite scale of magnitude,³ we shall fall into an abyss of intellectual confusion, and incur serious risk of making shipwreck of our faith, as not a few eminent thinkers did in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Numbers xxiii. 19.

² Isaiah lv. 8.

³ Psalm l. 21.

Among these John Stuart Mill—if he had not been carefully educated in the negation of religious belief—would be the most conspicuous example. His deliberately pronounced verdict against God was as follows:—

‘It is impossible that any one who habitually thinks, and who is unable to blunt his inquiring intellect by sophistry, should be able without misgiving to go on ascribing absolute perfection to the author and ruler of so clumsily made and capriciously governed a creation as this planet and the life of its inhabitants. The adoration of such a being cannot be with the whole heart unless the heart be first considerably sophisticated. The worship must either be greatly overclouded by doubt, and occasionally quite darkened by it, or the moral sentiments must sink to the low level of the ordinances of Nature; the worshipper must learn to think blind partiality, atrocious cruelty, and reckless injustice, not blemishes in an object of worship, since all these abound to excess in the commonest phenomena of Nature

‘The Author of the Sermon on the Mount is assuredly a far more benignant Being than the Author of Nature. But unfortunately the believer in the Christian revelation is obliged

to believe that the same being is the author of both. This, unless he resolutely averts his mind from the subject, or practises the art of quieting his conscience by sophistry, involves him in moral perplexities without end; since the ways of his Deity in Nature are on many occasions at variance with the precepts, as he believes, of the same Deity in the Gospel. He who comes out with the least moral damage from this embarrassment is probably the one who never attempts to reconcile the two standards with one another, but confesses to himself that the purposes of Providence are mysterious, that its ways are not our ways, that its justice and goodness are not the justice and goodness which we can conceive, and which it befits us to practise. When, however, this is the feeling of the believer, the worship of the Deity ceases to be the adoration of abstract moral perfection. It becomes the bowing down to a gigantic image of something not fit for us to imitate. It is the worship of power only.¹

Under the influence of this logic, Mill declared himself resolved rather to go to hell than to worship such a Deity! To us who live in a new

¹ 'Nature, The Utility of Religion, and Theism.' 2nd edition pages 112, 113.

century it seems scarcely credible that a man of great intellectual ability should have committed himself to this congeries of errors—all of which were rendered possible by the one colossal mistake of supposing that the finite mind is competent to judge the Infinite Being. The influence of Mill's utilitarianism—a theory of ethics which was in his time stoutly controverted, and now seems obsolescent—is visible in the condemnation he pronounced. He seemed to himself to know quite certainly the only reason which can justify the creation of a world. Pleasure or happiness being the only good, the world must contain nothing but pleasure or happiness, if it is the work of a benevolent God. He regards the Deity as a Being antecedent to and altogether distinct from the created world; just as a human artisan is antecedent to and distinct from the house he builds and furnishes. It did not enter into Mill's thinking that possibly God and the world are one, and that God himself bears all the pain and sorrow which exists in his world.¹ It seemed impossible to Mill, that if he had been God he would have done just what God is doing, that he would have manifested his perfect wisdom, justice, and love, in ways which

¹ See Appendix, Note E.

man cannot now fully understand; and that therefore it is man's wisdom and man's duty to trust in God and obey His inward teaching. To the author of the book of Job, it was conceivable that man exists not solely for his own sake but perhaps also partly that he may be an object-lesson to other 'sons of God.' Is it so? We cannot tell. We are utterly unable to give any reason why there is a world at all. Indeed the question seems irrational. We speak of the foreknowledge, the design, the purpose of God; but this language is anthropomorphic. The great drama of evolution unfolds itself before our eyes: the scientific observer sees the creatures arranged rank above rank; each rank existing not for itself alone, but also for that which is next above it; inorganic matter for the vegetable kingdom; plants for the food of animals; the lower animals for the evolution of the higher; and all culminating, so far as we can see at present, in man. What ground have we for supposing that the series is closed with man?

There is one reason which suggests that man is the climax of this world's evolution; namely, the fact that both individually and as a race, man is still in process of evolving a character or type to which he has not yet attained. This being so, we

may reasonably ask that those who want to pass judgment on the work of God, should at least wait until it is finished. We know but little of what men have been in the past, and are now. Each one really only knows himself at first hand; and who is there who pretends to know himself perfectly? Moreover, there is the future, our own personal future, and the future of the species—we have no certain knowledge of that. The end is not yet. Let the judges wait until they have undergone the change called death, and until the end of the world. Surely if we have any certainty of any kind, we have this certainty, that we are incompetent to sit in judgment upon God and his universe.

But an objection may be raised on this very ground. If we are not competent, it may be said, to judge God; how can we have any concept of Him? To conceive is to judge; and if we may not judge, the word 'God' has no meaning. Even granting that we may be certain that God exists, this certainty is valueless if we have no notion at all of what kind of being God is. Logically, the objection hardly admits of answer. Practically, it comes too late. As matter of fact we have already a concept of God, both traditional and intuitional. The concept is imperfect but it

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is not valueless ; for it affects our conduct and our character. In the first place, the recognition that God is incomprehensible is a concept of God ; and its value is already evident in its restraining us from criticising his work as though we were competent to judge him. Mill, we observe, conceived the Nature-Deity to be power only. To conceive God as power, as omnipotence, is part of the traditional concept ; and the concept is reasonable, for in the world of phenomena the source of the moving force is hidden from us : where should it be but in God ? But it is not reasonable to conceive of God as blind, unconscious, unintelligent force. The world is not a chaos, but is rationally constructed, as by weight and measure. Physical science is based upon perfect faith in the constancy and regularity of the matter and forces of the universe. Biology goes beyond this in the discovery everywhere of the evolution of higher forms of life from lower. Ethical science is only possible because the free will of man is recognised as accounting for variations and inconsistencies in conduct and character. All these considerations unite in corroborating the religious faith in God which arises in us naturally, just as belief in ourselves arises, partly from intuitive feeling and partly from traditional

instruction. Far from being an empty concept, our concept of God is fuller of meaning than any other concept that we have, except that of the All; and God is the unity of the All. And after all contemplation and meditation, we are compelled to fall back upon the incomprehensibility of God. Our highest and best thoughts fall far below the unknown glory of the One who is all in all.

God is incomprehensible. This truth is as old as Moses¹ and as Job.² The Indian sage said :

He is unknown to whose think they know,
And known to those who know they know Him not.*

The apostle Paul impressed this truth on the keen-witted Greeks—‘If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; but if any man love God he is known of him.’ And again ‘Whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.’⁴

¹ Exodus xxxiii. 17-23.

² Job xxviii. 12-28.

* Bhagavad-Gita.

⁴ 1 Cor. viii. 2, 3 ; xiii. 8-10.

CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

THE last paragraph of the preceding chapter lies open to an objection which seems to undermine religious certainty. How can religion be certain when its definition is uncertain! Monotheism, polytheism, or pantheism cannot all be true; and since the definition given recognizes them all, where is the certainty? Not long ago the answer would have been prompt and decisive. There is only one true religion; false religions there are of many kinds, but each and all of them can safely be neglected, since they are nothing but a tissue of lies and absurdities. Missionaries to the heathen may study these erroneous beliefs in order to convince their devotees and win them to the true faith. And exposure of the absurdity of idolatry, and the shameful immoralities and cruelties of some of its many forms may be useful to prove the depravity of human nature

and the need of a supernatural revelation. Otherwise the Christian has no need to investigate the false religions.

The last half-century, however, has seen the birth of a new science, called Comparative Religion, which has already made progress; and has produced a prevalent opinion that all religions contain some measure of truth, while none of them is altogether free from some admixture of error. An exception is claimed in favour of the one divinely revealed religion which must necessarily be infallible, it is said. Yes; but even if it be the fact that an infallible religion was given; the benefit seems to have been lost; for this religion is split into three great divisions, each claiming to be the only true religion.

Is it then our duty first of all to make an exhaustive study of all religions before giving credence to any one of them? The affirmative reply would prevent the great majority of men from attaining to religious faith; since they have neither time nor opportunity to undertake the investigation. Practically, however, this question does not arise in their minds. In fact, religious belief is part of the great complex datum into which most men are born. We were taught religion by our parents and our religious teachers;

and in ourselves we felt the certainty of that invisible Being of whom they spake. Thus there was awakened in us a living certainty, which is not displaced by the knowledge, subsequently acquired, that all men do not think exactly alike in religion, nor by the consciousness that we ourselves are not omniscient and therefore not infallible. The one necessity for the retention and the growth of the religious faith which we have received is obedience to its commands. Experience is the verification which confirms and increases faith. In this respect religion runs parallel with all other kinds of truth; with truths of common-sense, of science, of social and political life. In general we are aware of human liability to error; but that does not weaken our certain knowledge and belief which has been and is constantly confirmed by our experience of its results.

In actual life it comes to pass sometimes that two religions, or two forms of one religion, come into conflict in one man's personal experience. The result may be that he sees that the religion of his past life is inferior to the new religion presented to him; in which case he transfers his allegiance. But does that mean an abandonment of his earlier religion as false? Not necessarily,

so far as he had before a genuine belief in the invisible Being or beings; and that belief moved him to self-restraint, to self-cultivation, and to right conduct towards his fellows. He will look back upon his first religion as true, as the only true religion for him, until the new and higher religion entered into his experience. For us who were born into what seems to us the highest religion, we have no need to hesitate in the rejection of polytheism. The existence of the inferior religions does not weaken the confidence we feel in the truth of our own. The errors of alchemy and astrology do not weaken the certainties of chemistry and astronomy. Similarly, the errors, and worse still, the cruelties and obscenities of some heathen religions do not unsettle the faith of those whose own personal experience corroborates the teaching they have received. We need have no fear of Comparative Religion, and the more we know of it the better. In reference to this, let us listen to Max-Müller.

‘I wish we could explore together the ancient religions of mankind, for I feel convinced that the more we know of them, the more we shall see that there is not one which is entirely false; nay, that in one sense every religion was a true religion, being the only religion which was possible at the

time, which was compatible with the language, the thoughts, and the sentiments of each generation, which was appropriate to the age of the world. I know full well the objections that will be made to this: Was the worship of Moloch, it will be said, a true religion when they burnt their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods? Was the worship of Mylitta, or the worship of Kali a true religion, when within the sanctuary of their temples they committed abominations that must be nameless? Was the teaching of Buddha a true religion, when men were asked to believe that the highest reward of virtue and meditation consisted in a complete annihilation of the soul?

‘Such arguments may tell in party warfare, though even there they have provoked fearful retaliation. Can that be a true religion, it has been answered which consigned men of holy innocence to the flames, because they held that the Son was like unto the Father, but not the same as the Father, or because they would not worship the Virgin and the Saints? Can that be a true religion which screened the same nameless crimes behind the sacred walls of monasteries? Can that be a true religion which taught the eternity of punishment without any hope of pardon or salvation for the sinner, however penitent?

'People who judge of religions in that spirit will never understand their real purport; will never reach their sacred springs. These are the excrescences, the inevitable excrescences of all religions. We might as well judge of the health of a people from its hospitals, or of its morality from its prisons. If we want to judge of a religion, we must try to study it as much as possible in the mind of its founder; and when that is impossible, as it is but too often, try to find it in the lonely chamber and the sick-room, rather than in the colleges of augurs and the councils of priests.

'If we do this, and if we bear in mind that religion must accommodate itself to the intellectual capacities of those whom it is to influence, we shall be surprised to find much of true religion where we only expected degrading superstition or an absurd worship of idols.'¹

As an illustration of the last sentence, which was written more than thirty years ago, hear two quotations from later books about the fetish-worshipping negroes of the Eastern and Western coasts of Africa. 'The East Coast Africans,' said Bishop Steere, 'are not idolaters; they all believe in God, but they think of Him as too great and

¹ 'Introduction to the Science of Religion,' 1873, pp. 261-3.

too far off to care individually for them.’¹ R. E. Dennet writes ‘Have the Bavili a conception of a divinity or God? You ask me, and I immediately am overcome by an almost irresistible desire to evade your question, not because I shall be obliged to answer you in a roundabout and hesitating way, but because, on the contrary, the conception of God formed by the Bavili is so purely spiritual, or shall I say abstract, that you are sure to think that I am mad to suppose that so evidently degenerate a race can have formed so logical an idea of a God we all recognise and try in various ways to comprehend.’²

When Max-Müller says—‘Every religion was a true religion, being the only one which was possible at the time,’ the assertion seems to be too sweeping. In antiquity Brahmanism and Buddhism were contemporary religions in India, as Brahmanism, Jainism, Mohammedanism, the Sikh religion and Christianity are now. In China, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism for nearly two thousand years have existed side by side, and for a large part of the time have been generally regarded as the three great doctrines; while it is not rare to meet with a Chinaman who professes

¹ ‘A Memoir of Edward Steere, D.D., LL.D.,’ 1888, p. 130.

² ‘At the back of the Black Man’s Mind,’ 1906, p. 166.

belief in all three, and some have even expressed willingness to accept Christianity also as a fourth member of the brotherhood. Though zealous believers are sometimes fanatical haters of all religions except their own, true religion is not incompatible with tolerance of dissenters; as witness the great Emperor Akbar in India, in an age when religious persecution and religious wars were the rule in Europe, when Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer were burnt at Oxford; and the massacre of St. Bartholomew viewed with horror in the court of Elizabeth, was celebrated with *Te Deums* in Rome. In contemplating these sad spectacles, the thought is suggested that we must not lay all the blame for them on religion. No doubt many persecutors like Saul of Tarsus have sincerely believed that they were doing God service when they killed the heretics; but high priests and kings have often been influenced by fear of losing power and profit through the spread of new opinions.

On the whole, the study of comparative religion, instead of weakening, actually strengthens religious faith. Guided by the theory of evolution, we perceive that there has been progress in the recognition of religious truth, and have no difficulty in feeling certain that monotheism

supersedes polytheism by right of superior truth and reasonableness. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that the many gods were real beings ; so far as they were of different characters and had opposing purposes, the result would be to produce chaos, where now order reigns ; but if, on the contrary, the many were all of one mind and worked together harmoniously, this harmony would indicate the existence of a principle and a power above them all, which can be no otherwise conceived than as the Supreme Being of monotheism. Whether the subordinate divinities are called 'gods' or 'archangels,' they are reduced to a position which does not enter into rivalry with the One who is over all.

CHAPTER VI

THE SENSE OF SIN

ALL beginnings, whether of physical or psychical life, are shrouded in obscurity. Life has underground roots, unseen stirrings in the darkness, before it emerges into open view. No one can tell the exact order in which religious feelings come to birth. Wonder, awe, fear, delight, the feeling of dependence may arise in varying degrees of intensity, and in different modes of connection and succession in different individual minds. Can any one remember precisely his earliest feelings of any kind? As we look back from the adult stage, the conviction of sin seems to have been the beginning of practical religion; or perhaps we should say, as the origin of the perception that religion is or ought to be the chief interest in life, which controls or should control all lesser interests.

The ethical judgment 'I have done wrong' is

self-blame; but the sense of sin is more than an ethical judgment. The feeling of sin implies that some one else also condemns me for the wrongdoing. Who or what is this other judge? Some thinkers have pointed to the judgment of society—of the family, the village, the clan, the nation—as this external judge. No doubt when our self-condemnation is endorsed by that of the social groups to which we belong, the shame and fear which we feel are aggravated. But we may incur the blame of others, and suffer penalties at their hands, for actions or abstentions which our own consciences dictate; and in such cases the condemnation of our fellows does not produce in us the feeling of sin. On the contrary, he who has the approval of his own moral sense, can face the world's censure without flinching. Moreover, the knowledge which our neighbours have of our ethical character extends only to its manifestations in words and actions; of our internal desires and volitions they have no knowledge, except as so manifested. In the privacy of our secret consciousness of our motives, the feeling of sin is felt, and its sting is deeper when the good opinion of society lays us under self-condemnation for adding hypocrisy to our other offences. It is clear, then, that the

judgment of men cannot be the cause of conviction of sin. What is the difference which marks off the conviction of sin from the merely ethical self-blame. Examination of the feeling itself gives the answer. Immorality is breach of the moral law regarded as an abstraction; sin is breach of the moral law regarded as the law of God. 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight.'¹ 'The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast saying. God be merciful to me a sinner.'² Confucius said, 'He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray.'³ Similar expressions might be quoted from other scriptures, but it is enough to appeal to personal experience. If there are any who have never had this feeling, the attestations of other minds will have no effect on them. As rational beings they should consider whether they have not perhaps missed an experience which they ought to have felt; whether they have not overlooked evidence of their relation to the invisible Being from whom they received their life, and to whom they are accountable for the use they make

¹ Psalm lvi. 4.

² Luke xviii. 10.

³ Legge's Translation of the Chinese Classics, Vol. i., p. 23.

of it. But those who have the feeling are certain of its existence and its meaning.

The conviction of sin is not a subjective illusion. What a thousand others feel just as I do comes from a cause objective to each and to all. The testimony of other minds is the decisive proof of objectivity. In respect to the conviction of sin, this testimony is not universal—there are some who say they have not felt it—but it approximates so nearly to universality that these exceptional cases may be regarded as abnormal.

The feeling is corroborated by general analogy. Our life is rooted in and encompassed by a system of natural laws, mechanical, biological, psychical. Except in relation to these laws we can neither think nor feel nor act. Yet our reaction against these laws is not wholly determined by them. We can obey them, or neglect, or resist them, ignorantly or purposely. If we neglect a physical or biological law, the law is not thereby destroyed, but we suffer loss or pain or injury or death. All these mechanical and biological laws belong to the Infinite Whole in which we live and move and have our being. Is it then conceivable that the mental or moral law alone, has no connection with the Infinite Being?

It is impossible to believe this. The laws of nature are the laws of God; so too is the moral law written in human nature which warns us of our responsibility to the Author of our being. 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.'¹ Human desires and volitions are frequently in antagonism to the law of God; and it is out of this antagonism that the conviction of sin arises. This is an irresistible proof of the objectivity of the moral law. Our feeling of physical resistance proves to us the reality of the material world. Our feeling of resistance when we struggle against the dictates of conscience convinces us that we do not create the law we are so reluctant to obey. There is a power 'not-ourselves which makes for righteousness;' and that power is the Infinite Being. The verdict of conscience is the voice of God.

The conviction of sin is a knowledge of God. The first certain knowledge we have of God is that He is incomprehensible by us; and therefore we are incompetent to judge Him and His work.

¹ Galations vi. 8.

This second knowledge of God reveals to us that He is our Judge, that we are responsible to Him for the exercise of the powers He has given us. By this second certainty we are saved from an irreligious agnosticism. In itself agnosticism is a true feeling. We are right in believing that the Deity is inconceivable by finite minds. If we had no conviction of sin we might imagine that our breaches of the moral law began and ended in ourselves and in our relations to our fellows. But this deep-seated and inexpugnable feeling that we have sinned against God is a fact of consciousness which cannot be set aside. We cannot but regard it as a fact which comes into our experience by divine law ; just as physical pain comes by divine law. And in both cases we are equally sure that the pain comes as a guide to conduct, indicating what we ought to do and ought not to do.

Are we infallible in this feeling? So far as the fact of its existence is concerned, there is no possibility of error. But the inferences we draw from the fact are not necessarily infallible. Sometimes the feeling seems to be morbid, exaggerated. Now it cannot be questioned that the wrong-doing, the wrong desires, the wrong purposes, which lead to the conviction of sin are

morbid; that is, they are an unhealthy and harmful development of our nature. They ought not to be. If then the feeling of self-blame should appear to be in some cases, to some extent morbid, this result would not seem to be unnatural. The evil desires and evil volitions are a disturbance of the moral equipoise and self-control of the soul; the rebound from the evil may be affected injuriously by the previous disturbance. As some think too lightly of sin, so others have gone to the other extreme. The sin, they say is against the Infinite Being, therefore it is an infinite sin. That a finite being should be capable of an infinite action or state seems to be a contradiction. The heinousness of sin is not to be measured by the greatness of the Being whose law is transgressed, but by the knowledge of right and wrong possessed by the transgressor, and the evil will which the offence manifests. Hence that plea of self-sacrificing love—‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’¹ Casuists have divided sins into venial and mortal, but the same voice said, ‘Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.’² The Master judged more leniently than

¹ Luke xxiii. 38. ² Matthew xii. 31.

the disciple who taught that to keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point was equivalent to becoming guilty of all.¹ In any case the notion that human sin is infinite is an exaggeration. Nevertheless, when a man seriously considers that sin is the finite being setting itself to oppose the Infinite, and the possibility that this alienation may increase and become habitual, he will not be inclined to minimise his demerit; and if there is any feeling of reverence in his mind and any gratitude for the goodness of God in his heart, the folly of such antagonism to the Supreme Being must seem a moral offence of a very grave character. On the whole it may be doubted whether we are really able to take a much worse view of any case than we ought to take; and it seems almost impossible that any who do feel their inward tendency to a persistent state of sin, can fail to regard their case as worthy of the strongest condemnation.

The conviction of sin however is only the beginning of an earnest attention to religion; right in itself its chief value is in what follows it.

¹James ii. 10.

CHAPTER VII

THE CALL AND IMPULSE TO A BETTER LIFE

THE feeling of sin is not a barren state of mind, ending with itself, or passing away without leaving any trace upon the character: it may be resisted and stifled, in which case the sinner is more liable to sin again than he was the first time; or it may be attended to and allowed to work out its proper effect, repentance and reformation. Painful feelings are warnings and guides—hunger bids us seek food; disease, medicine or change in the way of life; bereavement teaches us to remember the brevity of life, to work while we can, and to cherish the loved ones from whom we must some day be separated. Conviction of sin is a painful feeling: it warns us against the evil behaviour which produced it, opens our eyes to the necessity of watchfulness and effort against repeating the wrong conduct, and to the cultivation of right character and a will always directed

towards moral goodness. These being natural and rational results of the conviction of sin; and this conviction having been produced by the right and fit development of experience, we take them as a call from the Author of our nature and the nature of our environment to seek the right and good life; and this is not all, the conviction of sin and its results really are an impulse, a motive-power, repelling us from moral evil, drawing us towards the sinless life which becomes our ideal.

Actual experience abundantly confirms this view of the beneficent consequences of the conviction of sin; and it is well to observe these consequences in one's own experience, and so far as we can, in the experience of others. It is not safe to accept the descriptions given by preachers and theologians without comparing these with what we know of the reality. It seems to me a pertinent observation that human nature is weak as well as wicked—perhaps it would be true for the most part to say, weak rather than wicked. Sin is not always and wholly a wilful and deliberate rebellion of the whole man, his reason, his affections, his appetites, all united in conspiracy to cast off allegiance to the divine law of our being. We have the highest authority for

this in the prayer of Jesus for those who crucified him—'Father! forgive them for they know not what they do.' If this was said in such a grave case, surely it may also be said of the beginnings of sin in all men; for the first sins are those of the child; and these acts or tempers or emotions cannot be pronounced sinful, if we may trust the Apostle Paul, until the child knows that they are wrong. This knowledge may come from the teaching of parents and elders; but in some cases the feeling of sin seems to be the first knowledge of sin. Not until the wrong has been committed is it distinctly known as wrong. I will not say that this is always so; but at least, the child who has never had a sense of having been or done wrong, must have a knowledge of good and evil after his first feeling of sin, very much clearer and more powerful than he had before; when he knew them only from watching others.

Fear is an element in the feeling of sin—fear of moral degradation, of evil consequences, in loss of reputation, of friends, of health; fear of incurring punishment from the administrators of human law; and all these may be taken as punishments ordained by the Moral Governor of the universe. This fear of God's displeasure is

the religious aspect of the case. Nevertheless, this fear of men and fear of God, actually operates as a stimulus to repentance and reformation; it is part of the spiritual force which urges from sin to righteousness; it is therefore, not only and altogether the manifestation of an angry Deity, bent upon the infliction of punishment. On the contrary, it is a proof of the Divine will concerning us, that we should 'cease, to do evil and learn to do well;' so that we hear a voice proclaiming—

'Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return unto the Lord,
And He will have mercy upon him,
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.'

In the preceding chapter, the possibility of our feeling of sin, in itself a natural, right and rational feeling, becoming morbid, has been pointed out. In this connection, it may be said that to doubt the freeness, spontaneity, and fulness of the divine forgiveness, offered in this inspired utterance would be a morbid state of mind. To doubt God's mercy is sin. It may be asked—But are there no conditions, the fulfilment of which is necessary, before so great and undeserved

a boon, can be ours? In any case in which evil effects of our sin can by us be removed, the removal is a condition. The thief must restore what he stole. He who has injured his fellow-man, must acknowledge the wrong and make amends so far as it is in his power to do so. The repentant sinner must earnestly desire and resolve to sin no more. All this is contained in the feeling of sin, and does not need to be pointed out to any intelligent person. These actions are not of the nature of services or propitiations, or compensations which man brings to God in order to be worthy of the Divine mercy. They are rather parts of that right conduct, and right character, that sinlessness, which is the Divine will concerning us, and which we can only attain by the inner working of God in our minds and wills. They are the Divine forgiveness. That is the way in which God forgives—He makes his forgiven ones grow in wisdom, in love of moral goodness, in spiritual strength.

It has been said that we finite creatures cannot of ourselves foretell how God will deal with sinners. Only a divine revelation can give us any information as to whether there is any forgiveness, and if there is, then on what conditions. This is quite true; if we recognise that God does

reveal His forgiveness to those who trust in Him. If any one should say that, the Deity being incomprehensible, it is, so far as the human mind can conjecture, just as probable that He will utterly and for ever destroy the sinner for his first offence as that He will forgive and save him; what sort of a concept of God can such a man have? Although man's thought of God is imperfect, it is bound to be the best that our mind is capable of. We must think Him in anthropomorphic terms; and so thinking, the parable of the prodigal son teaches us how we ought to conceive of the Heavenly Father. It may be that if we had not the gospel, we should not have conceived of God as our Father; though Paul found the belief already expressed in the writings of Greek poets. But we have the teaching of Jesus Christ, and on the ground of that teaching it is impossible to exaggerate the Divine love and willingness to forgive all sinners and to make them perfect in harmony with Himself. To exaggerate the sin of man may be not impossible; to think too largely, too well of the goodness and mercy of God is literally impossible—inadequate our conception may be, but the fault is in defect, not in excess.

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For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind ;
And the Heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.
But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own ;
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

With the deepest reverence be it spoken, a sinful human mind may think that it is not left only to appeal to God's mercy. Reflecting that He brought us into existence without our consent, placed us in the midst of temptations while we were still children who had inherited predispositions to evil from many generations of sinful ancestors, we may with at least a semblance of right reason suppose that we have a claim on His justice as well as on His mercy ; that we may expect Him to endure our foolish ways with an infinite long-suffering, and to put forth His almighty power to cleanse us from our pollutions, and to restore us to our right minds. And this is in accordance with the teaching of Christ's disciple :—' If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'¹

¹ 1 John i. 9.

There is ground, therefore, for believing that sin happens, although by human fault, yet also in accordance with divine providence, in order that man may overcome sin and achieve a good nature, a will ever turning towards the right, a fixed and firm disposition to fulfil the moral law and accord with the divine will. So the fall of man into sin becomes the occasion of his first step upwards to moral perfection.

CHAPTER VIII

SOCIAL RELIGION

THE beginning of religion in the individual soul is the reverse of social ; at least so far as the conviction of sin is the beginning. The soul stricken by a sense of guilt, and feeling that this is a situation in which it has to do with God alone is absorbed in its own sadness and anxiety. The feeling of sin isolates a man from his fellows, and is distinctly a selfish feeling. True and right as a sense of demerit, true and right as recognising the reality and awfulness of the divine judgment, it is bad so far as it turns away from human relationships. But when the call and impulse to a better life is felt, all this is changed. Now hope dawns, efforts at amendment begin. Inasmuch as in the previous life when sins accumulated and the conviction of sin was not yet felt, these sins were largely those of neglect of social duties, and positive breaches of social right,

now the convinced sinner earnestly endeavours to fulfil his duties to his neighbours. Often it is the breach of social morality which leads to the feeling of sin against God; or if not so, still in either case when once there is hope of forgiveness and reconciliation with God, sympathy with our fellows is called forth; we sorrow for their sins as well as our own; we mourn our bad example which has encouraged them in evil ways; we rejoice to see others trying to live the right and good life. Under these influences religion greatly strengthens and expands brotherly-affection, not only making the individual more earnest in his social duties, but constituting a new tie of relationship which was not felt before. Sympathy between the religiously-disposed leads to unions for worship, for study of religious truth, and for its dissemination. Compassion for the irreligious and those in the darkness of undeveloped or corrupted religions, leads to efforts for their enlightenment. Thus every way the social aspect of religion is manifested and confirmed. An agnostic wrote a book in which he proposed 'the service of man' as a substitute for the service of God. The founder of Christianity demanded brotherhood first of all as the preliminary condition of true religion. The gift must be

abandoned at the altar, and the would-be worshipper must first be reconciled to his wronged or angry brother, before he might offer anything to God.¹ He himself came into the world not to be served, but to serve, even at the cost of sacrificing his own life for their redemption.² The service of man is the service of God.

What is commonly, in all religions, the lowest as well as the highest, called the worship and service of God or the gods—ceremonial assemblies, united for laudation of the Deity, for sacrifices or sacraments, for prayers and psalms, and teachings of dogma—really holds the lowest place in true religion. Among all the causes which lead to the decay and perversion of religion perhaps this is the most insidious and fatal. Prayer in secret solitude which is the natural refuge of the soul distressed by the feeling of its sinfulness, remains always the truest and most fitting expression of man's immediate personal relation to God. There he is not able to lose the feeling of real intercourse with the invisible Eternal Being, as he may lose it in the midst of a crowd of worshippers, with the sound of music, and the customary repetition of responses, chants and hymns. There he is not called upon to make

¹ Matt. v. 24.

² Matt. xx. 28.

profession of what other men say that he ought to believe. There he can with entire sincerity express the faith he really feels, or acknowledge his lack of faith, and cry, 'Help me to believe.'

Jesus Christ in his teaching, as it has come down to us in the New Testament, laid no command upon his followers that they should meet in assemblies for prayer and praise. All buildings erected for public worship in Christian lands from the little Bethel of a handful of Baptists to the vast and splendid cathedrals of our chief cities, had their origin, not in any express injunction of the Master or his Apostles, but in a natural inclination of human minds to congregationalism and collectivism. This is not hinting that churches, liturgies, and sacraments are contrary to the precepts and the will of Jesus Christ. Far from it; we may rather conjecture that he foresaw and deliberately permitted the gradual evolution of these associations for worship and fellowship in good works. Public worship was established in the land of his nativity; He himself took part in it; it is therefore impossible to suppose that he disapproved of it, since we find no word of prohibition anywhere in the New Testament. Nevertheless the absence of any express command to assemble for congregational

worship, throws into strong relief the distinct injunction to private, solitary prayer. 'But thou when thou prayest enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will recompense thee.' Compared with this emphatic instruction, the grounds and reasons for all other religious observances are inferior and subordinate. It is to be feared that every church in Christendom has suffered loss by purposely or unintentionally removing this indispensable manifestation and maintenance of the religious life from the supreme place assigned to it by our Lord, and permitting it to be regarded as on the same or even on a lower level than ecclesiastical ordinances of worship.

But this secret and isolated intercourse with the invisible Father of spirits is not intended to be a substitute for the zealous performance of our duties to men. On the contrary, private prayer is resort to the inexhaustible fountain of right spiritual impulses, the only true source of spiritual life, wisdom, and strength. The Son of God himself sought communion with His Father in solitary prayer. All the heroes, saints, and prophets of God have nourished their souls in this

¹ Matt. vi. 6.

way. And if there is anything which has been made certain by general religious experience, and can be made certain now by ever fresh experience, it is the certainty that by private prayer every human soul may enter into the felt presence of the Eternal, and receive spiritual life, guidance, and strength from the Infinite Love.

The social character of religion is seen in the prevalence of all manner of associations, some temporary and some permanent, intended to promote the increase and propagation of true religion. But it may be that the influence of religion in the common affairs of daily life, in those matters which are sometimes called secular, in order to separate them from religion and religion from them, is of more vital worth than what are esteemed specially religious occupations. In truth there is nothing secular, in the sense of non-religious. Every moment of time, every presentation of experience, every act of daily life, such as eating and drinking, tilling the soil, working at arts and crafts, buying and selling, playing games, studying literature, science, and philosophy—the whole of human life belongs to religion—misses an essential element of its rightness if it is not directly or indirectly under the influence of religion. To serve God and man in the

shop, the counting-house, the market-place ; in the fields and the factories ; in all the relationships of life, the married state, the family, the union of friendships ; in the cricket-field and the battle-field ; in the day-schools and the universities, and the parliaments—all this comes certainly and necessarily within the social side of the religious life. It is quite conceivable that a man might live a perfect religious life without ever going to church on Sunday, or attending a prayer-meeting ; but these so-called secular affairs, such as eating and drinking, working and playing, earning one's living, employing servants or being employed, make up our actual life ; the right conduct in all these activities and passivities is morality, and the right spirit which animates, guides, restrains the conduct is religion ; that is, our feeling of duty towards God and dependence on Him. What is technically called 'divine service' is not essential, though it may be helpful to those who have been taught to regard it as a religious duty. On the other hand it may be a serious hindrance to the true religious life ; if thereby the vital necessity of private prayer and right conduct is hidden from our eyes.

The certainty of social religion is known in experience : it needs not to be defended by

argument: it does not rest upon authority. He who in his secret prayers and meditations asks himself, what does God require me to do and to be? will not think that ritual worship in ecclesiastical forms is the first and greatest requirement. He will hear a voice in his own soul saying—‘Do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.’¹ Christ’s golden rule will come to remembrance—‘All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets.’² He will remember too the story of the Good Samaritan, and hear the voice of the Master saying ‘Go thou and do likewise.’³

¹ Micah vi. 8.

² Matt. vii. 12.

³ Luke x. 37.

CHAPTER IX

THE RELIGIOUS IDEAL

THE ideal which manifests itself to the truth-seeker who aims, not at intellectual theories, but at practical success in the conduct of his life, is his personal perfection according to the true concept of his own being in the universe. This ideal is not an arbitrary selection but a vital necessity. Unenlightened minds, especially inexperienced youths, fancy that the world of human life lies all spread out before them, wherein they may choose their own goal—the career of the artist or the soldier or the statesman, the pursuit of riches, or of knowledge, or of fame, or of sensual pleasure. All may be desired, but some one definite purpose must be formed in order to gain success. The various ideals conflict for supremacy, and but few men are able to make a decided choice and adhere to it consistently. Those who strive with steadfast purpose may

succeed, or may fail. If they succeed, then, too late, the question will arise—‘Did I make the right choice.’

The religious ideal differs from all the rest in that it is not an arbitrary choice; but is the ideal which we ought to set before us; and it is the ideal which subordinates all the lesser ideals to itself, rejecting some, retaining others, but only as subservient to the one highest and obligatory ideal.

That the religious ideal is supreme, and tolerates no rival, is an immediate certainty of experience. No one who has felt the conviction of sin and has realised that sin is the loss of harmony with God and with the true nature of things can possibly doubt that his one and all absorbing aim must be to live a sinless life. As matter of fact, he may be, probably will be at first, only half-hearted in his religion; and this want of unity in his own being will lead to relapses; and these relapses will renew his self-condemnation and fear. He has now two contrary experiences: the experience of religion and the experience of irreligion. There is no possibility of doubt in his comparison of the two experiences. He knows with immediate certainty which is true, which is right, which is in harmony with

the will of God. His misery may be greater than before, but his certainty will be deepened and strengthened. Then as he begins to make progress in the religious life, the ideal shines before him with its divine inflexibility. Thus the supremacy of the religious ideal becomes to him a self-evident certainty. Religion is trust in God, and love to God. The perfection of faith and love, he clearly perceives, involves in itself the certainty of its truth. Even while conscious of his own imperfection, he is able to see that nothing short of perfection can be his end and aim. The ideal of religion is the perfect life.

But what is the perfect life? What qualities, what actions, what character, constitute human perfection in this present world? We may have the conception of the perfect life as our goal toward which we strive, and yet, not having attained perfection, may be unable clearly to imagine what it is. In actual experience we are conscious of weaknesses against which we must guard, of faults to be overcome, of particular duties to be performed, of particular relationships to be rightly and worthily maintained; but a full and clear view of the perfect life is not ours. In this deficiency, living examples of a closer approximation to the ideal than we ourselves

have attained are helpful to our imperfect conception—most of all the example of the founder of our religion. But just because we fall short of these, it is not always easy for us to understand them. In no other way than by going forward can we improve our conception. We have to accept the fact that we have not yet attained, are not already perfect; and to press on to the ideal which is always beyond our clear comprehension. Our life is a process of evolution; human nature itself is a process of evolution. In knowledge for instance, the child cannot grasp the knowledge of the man; and the man whose knowledge exceeds that of any other of his own generation cannot foresee what the knowledge of the next generation, of the next century, will be. There is nothing unnatural, nothing to perplex and distress us in the fact that the ideal of religion is beyond the reach of our imagining power. Nevertheless we can form some conceptions of the ideal which may be trusted, and which will exercise a mighty attractive influence upon us.

The perfect life is a life in harmony with the truth of things, and this truth is not a heterogeneous inconsistent multiplicity, but an ordered system, a unity. Man's relation to God

includes all subordinate relations. In the perfect life, all times, all places, all labours, all pleasures, are holy. Art, science, politics, commerce, the family, the nation, the world all belong to God. The perfect man sees God everywhere; serves God in every occupation; loves all men and all creatures for God's sake; lives, moves, and has his being in God. Religion has no narrowness: on every side it stretches towards the Infinite. God encompasses, underlies, interpenetrates all things: there is nothing which is not related to Him; therefore in the perfect life every experience reveals Him, and binds His creature and his child closer to Him.

The perfect life conquers circumstances. Human nature with appetites and desires ever craving for gratifications which are sometimes unattainable, and when attained are never permanent, is the slave of an environment which hems it in on all sides, and compels a reluctant abstinence. While religion is weak, because only one force among many, a force which can restrain from excesses of licentiousness and incite to spasmodic efforts for improvement, but cannot control the other forces, our condition is not much altered in this respect. Circumstances are still too strong for us. We have not what we desire;

we are not what we feel we ought to be. Our religion, indeed, may make us more wretched, if less wicked, than before. In this miserable discord of our being, it may be difficult to catch so much as an occasional glimpse of the peace, the harmony, the security, the strength, the joy of the perfect life, which seems visionary and hopeless of achievement. Yet its seeds, its germinal principles, are already within us; and from the nature of the seeds we can forecast the nature of the harvest. Faith, hope, and love are the seeds. Imagine these increased thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold; increased until they fill the whole field of life; then one has some conception of the ideal attained.

Absolute trust in God, without exception, without reservation; certainty that He rules all things well; entire submission to the divine will; total renunciation of selfish aims; recognition of the truth that we are His, not our own; that we cannot with all our efforts and fretfulness alter by a hair's breadth the limitations which He has imposed upon us; that if we could it would assuredly be to our own hurt; the habituation to one simple and supreme desire to live the right and true life for His glory. Imagine a life governed by these convictions and emotions

steadily and harmoniously co-operating, where then will be the hostile circumstances which erstwhile were so baffling and heart-breaking? It is a changed world, a new creation, all its irksome limitations and compulsions have melted away like the snow and ice of winter before the genial light and warmth of spring. The soul has made its great act of self-renunciation, and lo! it is lord of the world. For it evil has ceased to be. There are only two evils—sin and pain. The dark eclipse of sin has passed away; the happy soul lives and walks in light that cannot fail. Pain is no longer an evil: for if it remains, it must be a good in disguise, an opportunity to prove the sincerity of faith and love. To bear pain for a beloved one, and so to save him or her from it, is not an evil, but a joy. To bear suffering for God, to be counted worthy to endure pain for the accomplishment of His hidden purposes of righteousness and love—this is the highest honour which can be bestowed upon us.¹ The suffering cannot be too great nor our strength too weak to bear the load; because it is God who appoints the affliction, and it is God who gives us the strength to endure it. The pain is not ours alone; it is His also; He bears it for us and in us.

¹ See 'The Mystery of Pain,' by James Hinton, page 90.

Thus in all things we are more than conquerors in one unbroken fellowship with God 'who is over all, through all, and in all.'

Observation of religious people, it may be said, does not support the assertion that their ideal is the perfect life. Do they not in public worship confess themselves 'miserable sinners?' True; they acknowledge imperfection, but they are not self-complacent; they feel the sinful state 'miserable;' they pray 'that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,' 'and grant that this day we fall into no sin.' More or less vividly, the ideal is seen as a goal not unattainable, nor far distant. Nor have we any right, because of our own shortcoming, to assume that others do not already realise what we strive for. In every generation some have won the reputation of sainthood; and how many more reach the blessed state without attracting the public attention, we cannot tell. And however meagre our personal attainment may be, if our faith is sincere, we have already the certainty that He who has begun his good work in us will continue it until His will concerning us is fulfilled.

Altruism, some moralists remind us, may be carried to excess; egoism also is a duty; we cannot promote social welfare, unless we attend

to personal needs. To these the total self-renunciation demanded by religion seems extravagant and mischievous. Actual experience removes this objection; the perfect life is the golden mean, free from all unnatural and unhealthy exaggerations. Total renunciation is required, because it corresponds to the truth of our being. We did not give ourselves life; we did not create the world in which we find ourselves; we are not our own; we have nothing which is of our own originating except our sin; and it is the selfishness which produces these sins that we are called upon to renounce. Religious self-renunciation is not a denial of the real self, nor of any property or power of self-existence; it is simply renouncing the misuse of self and the usurpation of our environment, both which belong to God. The self thus given into God's hands is not annihilated nor impaired. What is renounced is the perversion of the self, the vain attempt to set up in the universe a private personal interest, and to make this superior to the divine law which governs the whole. Self-sacrifice when complete is the real possession of self. Then the self hears the voice of God saying—'Take thyself in charge as a sacred trust, and keep it pure and spotless for Me.' In seeking perfection, the self is secure

from the perils of egoism, while at the same time the ego receives careful and constant cultivation to develop the peculiar excellence of the individual. God reveals Himself in variety. He no more intends our souls to be all alike, stereotyped repetitions of uniformity, than our bodies are. Each one must seek to perfect himself to the glory of God. Why God wants us at all is a mystery beyond our penetration; but being here we know that He does want us; and there can be no doubt that He wants each of us to be perfect in his or her own place, and after his or her own kind. We are not all forced into one mould, but are intended to grow freely in various styles of beauty, and for various uses. Instead of excluding a legitimate egoism, the perfect life is self-culture; and what exquisite and ravishing evolution is yet to come to pass in us, we cannot now foresee.

But the individual is never separated from society, and often he best promotes his personal perfection by thinking more of the salvation of the world than of self-culture. The only hope of social salvation is the universal prevalence of religion. Society consists of individuals; while the individuals remain selfish egoists, no redistribution of power and property, of labour and

leisure, no extension of education, no progress of science will cure the diseases of the social organism. Democracy in itself is no more immune from selfishness, lust, cruelty than aristocracy or monarchy. An atheistic socialism might prove itself a greater curse than any government the world has yet groaned under. But when religion is generally victorious, and developed to some good approximation to perfection, social evils will have well-nigh disappeared. Who can estimate the proportion of human misery which is the direct or indirect consequence of human sin? Is it nine-tenths or ninety-nine hundredths of the whole? Consider the evils of war and the preparation of war; the evils resulting from drunkenness, gambling, and unchastity; the consequences of ruthless competition for wealth, of the cruel selfishness of luxurious self-indulgent living; the gigantic frauds of unscrupulous trading. If these and all other evils which spring from irreligion were removed; if all human energy were turned to beneficent production, to the training of the young in religion and virtue, to the scientific study of nature for the benefit of mankind, in how brief a time would the aspect of the world be so changed that its happy denizens would look

back upon the sad story of the past as an evil dream! Religion, and only religion, can effect the regeneration of society. In religion is the source whence true philanthropy springs; religion alone can direct science and politics in the right course, and spur them on by the right motives. Hence religion, while essentially and necessarily individual, is also truly social and universal.

The certainty of religion is not limited to past and present experience. It has the highest mark of certainty, it enables us to predict. We know that when religion is perfected, its certain truth will shine forth with irresistible evidence.

CHAPTER X

REVIEW OF THE PRECEDING DEMONSTRATION

IN the preface to his 'Analogy' Butler says—
'Probability is the very guide of life;' accordingly his great work is content to accept probability as the basis of religion. This book begins with the proposition that 'religion is the surest and most practical of all human certainties.' Let us now consider the demonstration which has followed.

In the first place the demonstration is not mathematical, but scientific. In mathematics we deduce new truth from what is already known: for instance, that the 'square on the longest side of a right-angled triangle is equal in area to the sum of the squares on the other two sides,' is a truth not contained in the definition of a right-angled triangle, but a truth discerned by a chain of reasoning. In the concrete sciences demonstration is not deduction, but showing what really is. For instance, that the human skeleton

contains so many bones is not deduced from the visible form or the tangible feeling of human bodies; but by procuring skeletons and counting the number of the bones. That all normal human bodies contain the same number of bones is not a deduction from premises, nor is it seen by dissecting all human bodies: it is not demonstrated at all, but believed. The preceding argument followed the scientific method. First, it examined an actual experience of one religious life; to this it added other experiences known indirectly; all these however being a small fraction only of the number of cases which exist and have existed, the extension of the experience of the few examined cases to the whole number was an act of belief.

We began with an examination of common sense and scientific certainties, and observed that certainty is a state or attitude of mind which exists in a large number of particular certainties. These are as real and certain as any other facts of immediate experience. Their truth is established in the same way as that of the most familiar visible and tangible facts; we believe them. All certainty is belief. Knowledge as distinct from belief does not exist. When we try to define and to explain these certainties, then we

cease to be certain; we cannot entirely trust our definitions and explanations, because these are never complete. Consequently, the definitions and explanations are probabilities only. Science as distinguished from knowledge is theory or hypothesis; that is, probability suggested by immediate facts, and leading to expectation of other immediate facts. When this expectation is fulfilled in experience, the theory is verified; and we have another particular certainty. The foundation of all the certainties of common sense and science is belief in the original complex datum of consciousness.

Ethical and religious certainty is the feeling of duty towards our fellowmen, and towards God or the gods. This feeling in its various appearances is immediate certainty, as sure and as strong as vision and touch, pleasure and pain. Beginning from the feeling of self-interest, morality and religion are gradually evolved. As actual experiences all these certainties are quite as certain as the certainties of physics. In one respect their certainty is clearer and stronger than that of physics. In physics we have to do with material things which ultimately lie outside the region where our intelligence works effectively. We really do not

know, cannot imagine, what these material things are, and it becomes questionable whether they have any real existence apart from our sensible experience of them. In ethics and religion our feelings and thoughts are our own real being; and their existence is indubitable.

As subjective certainty this cannot be contested by a rational mind; but hasty thinkers suppose that in objective certainty physical truth is superior. The object of religion, however, was seen to be part of, or more properly the substance or underlying ground of the original complex datum. As the bodies of men reveal their souls, so the body of the universe, its visible and tangible totality, reveals the spiritual being or beings which cause, sustain and govern it. The concept of God is traditional, and is also intuitional, and it is quite clear on one point—namely, that the Deity is incomprehensible. To deny the existence of God is irrational; for the finite thinker who makes the denial claims omniscience. Genuine agnosticism is belief in the existence of God, and acknowledgment of his incomprehensibility. A brief consideration of comparative religion enabled us to see that polytheisms are an early stage in the evolution of religion—a stage which is left behind when the monotheistic

concept has been reached. The memory of a lower conception when it has been left behind does not weaken the certainty of the higher conception. Monotheism is not less true because our progenitors had not the intuition of the Divine Unity.

The subjective religious life is the centre and citadel of religious certainty. The conviction of sin accompanied or followed by the summons and impulse to the better life are immediate certainties stronger than what are called the objective certainty of visible and tangible things—stronger because the physical world is external to and apparently independent of the spectator, and thus is a kind of being capable of being doubted, not as to its existence, but as to the reality, the fundamental nature of its existence, which is doubted or denied by idealists; whereas the subjective religious life is the spectator himself—nothing apart from him but his very life and being in the time-series of successive presentations. This distinction of subjective and objective, however, cannot be made absolute and universal. For us it holds good in respect to the material world, which appears to us as ‘not ourselves,’ but the larger concept of the whole real universe contains ourselves as both material and

spiritual beings. Again, the immediately certain self is individual and unique—each of us is a separate self, and each is conscious only of one self; all other selves being indirectly known. Moreover the environment of each and all selves as sensibly perceived is to the selves, objective; but it is inconceivable as a self-sufficient unity—taken so it seems an irrational multiplicity. To the reflective mind this seeming manifold is not tenable as the truth. The world rests upon God as its cause, its source, its ruler, its sustainer. The unity and uniformity of nature, the universality of causation, that is, the persistence of regularity in its changes, are partial concepts, the meaning of which is that nature is a manifestation of God. God, it is said, is immanent in the world; perhaps it is better to say, the world exists in God. Best of all is silence, where the human mind is incompetent to judge, where it can only believe and worship.

The contemplation of social religion, and of the religious ideal, completed our survey of the immediate certainties of religion. By these the finiteness and isolation of the individual self were overpassed; and we entered into communion with the whole and with God. The real certainty of religion is in this its highest

evolution—an evolution not finished but still proceeding. What will be the further course of the evolution we cannot distinctly conceive. But we are certain that it will be an ever nearer approximation to the Eternal Being. In the material world evolution and catastrophe, life and death, follow each other, and we are lost in an infinite series of an irrational character. It is irrational not because our limited intelligence is incapable of summing up the series, incapable of conceiving its beginning or its end; for this only demonstrates that the whole is too vast for our power of thought to grasp. But it is irrational, because the concept of catastrophe is destructive only; and the concept of evolution contains no first cause; that is, no cause at all in the real meaning of cause. Besides this, the actual original datum produces in us the conception of an infinite, or indefinitely vast universe, which is never destroyed as a whole. A catastrophe may befall our solar system and shatter it into a nebula again—while Orion and the Pleiades and the Galaxy remain unmoved. In our mortal bodies, death follows birth, but birth does not follow death; it proceeds from life. Life once in existence seems to be immortal: it renews itself, changing its forms, evolving new species; but it

does not die. Thus the physical world taken by itself seems to be a false concept. The real universe, the Eternal Being, the One who is the All, is God—the Incomprehensible.

Once more we seem to lose our way in the immensities and the eternities: our certainty immediate and irrefragable as it is, seems to require some support. But this is only because we leave the sure way of life, which is practical faith and obedience, from moment to moment, and try to soar without wings, in intellectual speculations for which we are impotent. And such support is given to us. Professor Tyndall asked for a process of verification whereby the assumptions of religion shall be transformed into objective knowledge.¹ The religious life is this process of verification. The transformation of a human soul from a state of sin and misery into a holy and happy child of God is the verification of religion. In this we see an analogy between religion and physical science. In external nature we perceive an order of sequences, apprehended at first in particular instances; afterwards seen by wider and more accurate observation, to operate in general laws; at last becoming an immutable conviction that all physical pheno-

¹ 'Fragments of Science' Vol. II., p. 231.

mena are bound together in one universal order. This unity is too vast to be proved by human experience, it can only be received by faith.

The student of science, in all his observations and experiments, approaches the phenomena with this fixed belief in his mind, and always finds the belief verified in his experience. By this verification, the belief is, to use Tyndall's phrase, 'transformed into objective knowledge'—that is, experience produces the mental assurance that what we know subjectively exists objectively. So it is in religion. The fundamental truth that man belongs to the infinite and eternal order of the universe; that is, is related to God, is first apprehended in particular feelings; then, by enlarged experience this relation is seen to embrace the whole life of the individual and other personal lives which come under his observation; and finally, its effective power in the regulation of conduct and transformation of character both in the individual and in society, leads to the assured conviction that man's relation to God is the highest and deepest truth of human nature. The certainty of science and the certainty of religion are similarly given in and verified by experience—both are acts of faith at first which become settled habits of faith.

Do we sigh for more certainty in religion? There is no lack of certainty. What we need is more religion. In proportion as we are faithful and obedient to the measure of certainty already given, certainty grows, waxes stronger and stronger, thus pointing on to its own perfection, when in the perfect life certainty is perfect also.

CHAPTER XI

THE CERTAINTY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

HITHERTO, except by passing references to illustrate some assertion of fact or principle, Christianity has not been mentioned in these pages. Nevertheless every statement of immediate personal experience which has been propounded refers to the Christian religion—because the writer is a Christian. There is no such thing as abstract religion. All religion is a living soul of man or woman feeling his or her duty to God and to society; forming practical judgments in consequence of this feeling; and acting thereupon. Religion exists only in the Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan, Buddhist, and other definite religions; or, as the result of one or more of these. This last alternative arises, because there may be persons who are, or imagine themselves to be no longer Christian or Jew or any other

denomination of religion; but who still live in the religious spirit. These may be eclectics, having chosen for themselves some part of one or more religions; or they may regard themselves as independent inventors of a new religion. In any case, they are religious because they were born into a world which already possessed religions. No man can begin religion for himself; just as no man can begin an entirely new language. Volapuk, Esperanto, and every artificial language results from the previous naturally evolved languages. Whether artificial languages and eclectic religion will endure remains to be proved.

The demonstration of the preceding chapters establishes the truth of the Christian religion. To those who in this practical living way possess the certainty, it is perfectly satisfactory. Yet it obviously does not satisfy a mind which not only wishes to be sure of the truth of its own religious experience but also desires to be certain that all other religions are false. For the argument cuts the other way: it equally proves the truth of all other religions so far as these consist of the same experience. The Christian, at least, cannot maintain this inconsistency; for the founder of Christianity was a Jew and personally avowed his faith in the Jews' religion. Is monotheism

less true because the Jew and the Moslem believe it as firmly as the Christian? Are the justice, the mercy, the forgiveness of God less sure because other religions besides Christianity teach these divine attributes? The dog-in-the-manger spirit is alien to true religion: it is distinctly repudiated by the New Testament.

That objection, however, is almost obsolete: only among very narrow-minded and ignorant Christians can it be found. But another and graver objection has to be met. The demonstration it has been said does not cover the whole of Christianity: there are doctrines of such a nature that they cannot be proved by the immediate certainty of experience. It is so: Christianity is a historical religion and teaches its own history and the history of its founder. Moreover it transcends history in its doctrine of judgment to come and immortality. We who are now living in the twentieth century cannot verify in direct experience the events of the first century; we who are still in bodies of flesh and blood cannot now verify the life of those who have passed beyond our sight where our life is still hidden with Christ in God. The conditions of our present life in this world are not of our choosing. The certainty which belongs to personal ex-

perience cannot be arbitrarily carried over to realities which lie altogether outside that experience.

Religion from one point of view is universal; from another point of view it is differentiated from other human experience by its special character. Religion is universal, because it relates to God and men in their environment, to visible and invisible beings, to time and to eternity. All human experience falls within the scope of religion. Eating and drinking, for instance, are functions common to all animals, and to man as an animal. Yet religion teaches us to eat and drink to the glory of God, by giving thanks to the bountiful Giver of harvests and of life-sustaining rain; by exercising self-restraint against excessive indulgence of our appetites; and by care even in the use of food and drink, not to harm our brother by unloving behaviour. Similarly every part of our conscious experience comes under the rule of religion. Scientific thinking, a part of mental activity which has been exalted to a unique dignity and *quasi*-absolute character by some doctors of physical science, plainly comes under the yoke of religion by the moral obligation to think honestly and veraciously; not to do evil that good may come,

by shutting our eyes to truth which we do not wish to see, whether the wish springs from the notion that the sight of the truth will hamper us in the pursuit of selfish advantages, or that it will be injurious to the interests of religion itself. Religion is the supreme rule of life and nothing can escape it.

But when we look at that part of our actual experience which is meant by religion, the recognition of God, the conviction of sin, repentance and faith, the ideal of perfection, and the daily effort to approach more nearly to it; these experiences are the very centre, heart and life of religion, apart from which all else is but a living death. Now it is a law of certainties to which reference has been made repeatedly, that no certainty is disturbed or weakened by ignorance or doubt on other matters. Whether Mars and Venus are inhabited is uncertain, but that this earth of ours is inhabited is certain; that uncertainty has no logical connection with this certainty. Whether you and I pre-existed before we were born into this world, we do not know; but we exist here and now. The given certainties of religion are certain. They are true and trustworthy. They are the actual guides of life, and are verified by their

effect in making us religious. This is the first and most important reply to the supposed difficulty.

The second observation is also of importance. Whenever truth lying outside the range of this immediately certain religion can be logically deduced therefrom; it is evident that the certainty of experienced religion is the basis upon which the logically-inferred truth rests. For instance, we call our religion the Christian religion, meaning that its founder was a Galilean Jew who lived and died about fifty generations ago; this is historical fact which cannot be verified by us; we accept it on the evidence of tradition supported by documents and monuments. The chain of testimony is complete and produces perfect assurance of the fact. Why do we thus believe? First of all, because through this Christian religion we received the revelation of God, the conviction of sin, the impulse to repentance, the new birth, the ideal of the perfect life. Apart from this religious life in our own experience, what would it matter to us who founded the religion? We received the historical fact from our fathers and teachers. Why did they believe it? Because they too experienced a like religious life. And so we mentally pass

along the chain of successive links until we come to the first believers in Jesus the Christ. They believed in Him in like manner; because He convinced them of sin, called them to repentance, taught and led them in the way of the perfect life. They were in number a few hundreds, or a few thousands; but there were, I suppose, for every one of them, ten other eye-witnesses and hearers of the young self-taught rabbi from Nazareth, who did not believe the new teaching; who hated it as a new theology and hunted the heretical preacher to his death on the cross. Probably, however, the active persecutors were not so numerous, the great mass simply stood on one side as spectators while the zealots plotted his destruction. The numbers we can only conjecture, and whether more or fewer on either side, the argument is unaffected. The one clear certainty is that a small number of the Jews believed in the teaching and in the divine mission of Jesus. If they had not so believed; there would have been no Christian religion to hand down; unless indeed the first believers had been Greeks, Syrians, Romans, or of other nationality. The one rock on which the Christian religion is built is the living faith of the first and of all the subsequent generations of those who have had

the immediate certainty of personal salvation through Him.

To inquire into the detail of the history is beyond the scope of this book. But we may say with confidence that no historical fact which remains doubtful is of vital importance to our Christian faith. He himself knew not the day and the hour of His second coming. What we do not now know, we shall know hereafter. Meantime, there is still another objection to be considered. Believers there are, who for themselves are quite satisfied with the kind and the measure of the evidence that is given; but they are dissatisfied, because they desire to convince unbelievers; and unbelievers refuse to be convinced by the arguments based on the inward experience of believers. And the unbelievers are hardly to be blamed on this account. We are justified in urging them to acquire the inward experience for themselves; but if they refuse to be persuaded, we are powerless. What then? Can we imagine that it could be a real benefit to them, if we could force them to believe in the truth of a religion with which they have no sympathy? Of men of similar character the Master said—‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from

the dead."¹ Let us have faith in God. Do we long to do something for the conversion of obdurate minds? Let us love one another more. Let us put an end to all bickerings and animosities among Christians. That is an order. Shall we not at length make up our minds to try what obedience to that order will effect?

¹ Luke xvi. 31.

CHAPTER XII

THE CERTAINTY OF IMMORTALITY

WE bury our dead 'in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.' And yet the feeling of certainty we have by the grave-side, with the sound of the earth falling upon the coffin in our ears, is not the immediate certainty of our conscious experience. It is not like the certainty of our vision of the fellow-mourners standing around, of the solid ground and the over-arching sky; nor like the certainty of sin, of repentance, of forgiveness, of the effort towards the perfect life. The certainty of the life after death has not been verified in our case: we are still on this side the river, the river itself we cannot see, still less the region beyond. Have we then any certainty of the world to come? As matter of fact, innumerable souls have rejoiced in confident expectation of stepping upward into the light of the new

heavens and new earth; but also as matter of fact many have said sorrowfully—

O could we make our doubts remove,
Those gloomy doubts that rise
And see the Canaan that we love
With unclouded eyes !

This intermittent faith is not an absolute distinction from the other certainties. While as yet the perfect life is a goal towards which we strive, our belief is liable to vary in intensity; still the repeated verification of a belief makes it an automatic certainty, operating without effort, and impregnable to assault. With a belief wholly beyond our power to test in experience, the same feeling does not occur. The certainty of immortality differs somehow: it is either faint and flickering, or it is inferential, owing its conclusiveness to logical deduction. In the second alternative, our work is to discover the premises on which the reasoning is based.

Let us in the first place look at the facts with the eyes of a scientific spectator. Here we come across two instructive observations. The first is the fact that immortality is not an exclusively Christian idea. Other religions older than Christianity possessed it—Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Hindoos, Scandinavians, conceived in

various pictures the condition of those who had entered the other world. In the present day, Brahmans and Buddhists and Moslem believe in the after-life. The belief seems to be almost universal in the religions of mankind; although individual men and women may practically neglect this article of their creed.

Now this ancient and wide-spread existence of the belief before and outside of Christianity, dispels the notion which some have entertained that the belief is a Christian invention. Paley's definition of virtue as 'the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness,'¹ coupled with the proposition which heads his evidences, in effect makes the belief both the basis and the substance also of the Christian religion, implying that even knowledge of God and of His will, would not suffice as a motive to right conduct, unless supported by self-interest. This misrepresentation has tended on the one hand to weaken belief in immortality, and on the other to produce a prejudice against Christianity. We gain a step towards truth, when we note that Jesus Christ did not originate the belief, but adopted it as a part of the Jewish religion, and did so, although

¹ In his 'Moral and Political Philosophy,' chapter vii.

it was markedly absent from the ancient Hebrew faith, which looked for God's reward in this life, not after death, and was actually opposed by the Sadducees in his own time.

It appears, then, that the expectation of immortality is a product of natural evolution. I imagine that primeval man found mortality as difficult to believe as his later successors find immortality. Certainly in his conscious experience in this world man is neither born nor dies. He is an eye-witness of what he calls birth and death of other individuals; but he cannot remember his own birth, nor can he anticipate in consciousness his expected death. Some savage tribes ascribe death to witchcraft when not produced by war or accident; that is, they regard death as abnormal. This perhaps may account for the wide-spread diffusion of the notion of immortality among so many races and religions. If we do not accept this hypothesis, some other origin must be sought. The unequal distribution of happiness and misery in this life, and the many cases in which bad men flourish and good men are afflicted, have suggested the belief that the gods will redress these inequalities in another life. This thought might naturally occur first to the oppressed poor and to the persecuted

righteous man; but evidently, the conception of future retribution is double-edged, and those who welcomed the prospect when it threatened tyrants and rogues, might on second thoughts have fears on their own account. At all events, the dualism of Heaven and Hell is found in many religions. This dualism excludes the supposition that man's selfish longing for continued existence is the cause of the concept of immortality. Whether the future life is more desired than feared, or more feared than desired, it is not possible to pronounce confidently. Under the apprehension that comparatively few will be found meet for everlasting life, and that for the great majority of mankind an eternity of torment is the inevitable doom, those who expect that they themselves are sure of a place among the redeemed might well feel sad at this doctrine of immortality, and be willing to renounce their own felicity for the sake of quenching the fires of hell, if such might be: as Paul was ready to wish himself anathema from Christ for his brethren's sake. I am not saying that I think this terrible expectation is the Christian doctrine of the future: but some have held it to be so, and have felt it almost intolerable though they saw no escape from it. How, then, can it be said that the belief in immortality

is the fruit merely of man's vain longing for continued existence ?

Regarding the question from this point of view, the expectation of a future life, the foreboding of a judgment to come, seems rather to be given to man, than invented or inferred by him. It seems to be an instinctive belief, which he can neglect or struggle against, but cannot extirpate. This taken by itself is a probable argument for the truth of the belief ; and so long as there is nothing to counterpoise it, the probability would be strong enough to make a wise man resolve to live as though the belief were true—as Bishop Butler taught. But is there nothing to the contrary ? In the last century, it was confidently asserted that physiological science had settled the question once for all ; by demonstrating that life is a function of the brain, that is, of a part of the perishable body ; and therefore the life or soul or self cannot possibly survive the death of the body. The argument seemed cogent to many, though it never was what it seemed ; because in truth our elders knew no more of the real ultimate nature of matter, or body, than we do—and that is just nothing at all. In this total ignorance it is just as probable that matter is a function of mind, as that mind is a function of matter.

In that final all-inclusive monism which science seeks, and philosophy assumes, the persistence of mind is as secure as that of matter ; or, if there be a difference, mind has the preferential claim ; our finite minds cannot cause, can only perceive the phenomena we call material, but that is no reason why infinite mind should not create matter at will. Recent discoveries in physics have greatly modified the scientific view of the primacy of matter. The argument that mind is a function of brain has been discussed from the psychological side by William James, in a convincing way. His reasoning cannot well be condensed ; and the reader should refer to the little book itself. A few sentences may be quoted—

My thesis now is this : that when we think of the law that thought is a function of the brain, we are not required to think of productive function only ; *we are entitled also to consider permissive or transmissive function.* And this the ordinary psycho-physiologist leaves out of his account.

Suppose, for example, that the whole universe of material things—the furniture of earth and choir of heaven—should turn out to be a mere surface-veil of phenomena, hiding and keeping

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back the world of genuine realities. Such a supposition is foreign neither to common sense nor to philosophy. Common sense believes in realities behind the veil even too superstitiously ; and idealistic philosophy declares the whole world of natural experience, as we get it, to be but a time-mask, shattering or refracting the one infinite Thought which is the sole reality into those millions of finite streams of consciousness known to us as our finite selves

“Life like a dome of many coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.”

. Admit now that *our brains* are such thin and half-transparent places in the veil. What will happen? According to the state in which the brain finds itself, the barrier of its obstructiveness may also be supposed to rise or fall. It sinks so low when the brain is in full activity, that a comparative flood of spiritual energy pours over. At other times only such occasional waves of thought as heavy sleep permits get by. And when finally a brain stops acting altogether, or decays, that special stream of consciousness which it sub-served will vanish entirely from this natural world. But the sphere of being that supplied the consciousness would still be intact ; and in that more real world with which, even whilst here, it was con-

tinuous the consciousness might, in ways unknown to us, continue still.'¹

Arguments in favour of immortality have been supposed to be given by what is called Psychical Research into the phenomena of alleged communications received through specially sensitive persons, called mediums, from those who have already passed through death, and entered the other world. No attempt will be made here to estimate their value.

On the whole this survey of the question from the abstract spectator's point of view is in favour of the belief in immortality. At least we may conclude so much as this—if science does not strongly support the expectation, on the other hand it does not to the smallest extent affect the certainty of the Christian religion so far as its present reality and efficacy are concerned. The conviction of sin does not depend upon the length of time we have yet to live: the sins are past, the conviction is of actual wrong done, and of good left undone; the repentance we have felt; the moral change in our character; our certainty of the divine forgiveness; our faith in Jesus Christ

¹ 'Human Immortality,' by William James. 1899, pp. 32-38.

as the Son who has revealed to us the fatherhood of God—all this is actual inward experience of the past and of the present. The sure and certain hope of eternal life is an outcome from this experience, its flower and fruit, rather than its root, the crowning pinnacle of the building, not its foundation. Logically, the argument in brief is this—the Christian religion is the religion of Jesus Christ, the religion which he himself lived, which He taught to His disciples, and not only to those who were his contemporaries, but to us also who have received the teaching through written documents, through the living tradition of preceding generations of believers, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God which uses all these means to enlighten and to influence us, and draw us on towards perfection. In this religion the belief in immortality has its place as a doctrine which was taught by Jesus Christ himself, and is corroborated by the fact of His own resurrection. The certainty which belongs to the Christian religion as a whole, belongs to this essential part. Therefore our hope is sure and certain. Formally, the logic seems to be correct. It is the way we reason whenever we infer from experience any truth which transcends experience; as for instance when in physical

science we infer future uniformities from past uniformities.¹

But there is much besides formal logic when we reason from the basis of immediate religious experience. In so reasoning we are far away from the fabulous point of view of the abstract spectator. We reason from the real point of view of faith and love. And if we have in our intellectual way of thinking the slightest feeling of uncertainty in respect to the future life, the first necessity is to get the right state of mind towards the subject-matter we have to consider. The outsider, the non-believer or half-believer, is disturbed in his reasoning by self-interest of one kind and another: he passionately demands a life of future felicity for himself and his loved ones; or he quails before the fear that, when the books are opened and the record of his life read out, he will find himself among the condemned. Swayed this way and that by his personal interest, how should he be able to consider the momentous question in a calm, trustful spirit? On the other hand the believer who has drunk deeply into the spirit of His Master, and is in sympathy with Him, knows and agrees with Christ's law of life—'Whosoever

¹ See Bosanquet's 'Logic,' vol. i, p. 307.

wills¹ to save his life, will lose it, but whosoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.'

Consider this law; it is not arbitrary, but a law of natural necessary evolution: he whose will is bent upon his own continued existence for his own sake, fails of the attainment of his desire, because his very selfish desire manifests his unfitness for the higher life of the eternal state. But the true disciple who loses his life, loses his soul, his very self, that he may follow Christ in the way and to the bitter end, he finds himself again in the beyond, for where the Master is there must his servants be.

Now let us think out the whole question from this point of view, in this spirit. We have no experience, as yet, of the future life. Will there be for us personally such a life, or will death be the end of our personality? The answer is—God knows which is the best, which is right, and we say—Father not our will, but Thine be done: Father, our will is that Thy will, not any separate will of ours shall come to pass. In this entire self-renunciation, saying—Father into Thy hands we commend our spirit—we have the certainty that God's will is done, will be done, cannot be thwarted. But our meditation does not stop

¹ In the Greek *ὁς γὰρ ἀν θέλῃ* . . . Matt xvi. 25.

here. Asking—shall I live hereafter? we may question our own worthiness; but there is more to consider. Christ too took up His cross, renounced Himself, and submitted to death. He rose from the dead because He is the Son and the Word of God, the embodiment of the Eternal Life, who could not possibly be holden by the negation, death. And we are His. He loved us and gave Himself for us, that we might be one with Him and behold His glory which He had with His Father before the world was. We have renounced self, but we have not renounced Christ: unless it should absolutely be God's will, we cannot consent to miss seeing the King in His beauty, surrounded by His prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints, of whom this world was not worthy. Surely He will not renounce us, not the feeblest and the meanest who has renounced self for His sake. Then there is another thought—God loves us: He loved us when we were yet sinners; He loves us now because we love Jesus Christ, His Word, the expression to us of His Will, of His very Being. In these thoughts the certainty of immortality is fully assured.

Yet again: hitherto we have regarded immortality, the life to come, as outside our personal experience, and so it is, according to our present

finite way of feeling and thinking. But we have already some experience of the Eternal Life: for that life, whatever other qualities and powers it may develop in us in the progress of our natural evolution, substantially and fundamentally is the life of perfect trust in God, of perfect love to man—the life character and will which were in Jesus Christ. We have already something of that perfect life, of that divine nature in ourselves; and this is our true being, which is permanent. The sensual, selfish, hating and hateful being is a denial of God's will and purpose, and is therefore transient and perishable. But 'we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.'¹ We have no fear of judgment to come; for we have heard His voice—Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth Him that sent me hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.'² 'Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.'³

¹ 1 John iii. 14.

² John v. 24.

³ John xi. 26.

THE END.

APPENDIX

NOTE A TO PAGE 11.

The prevalence of the opinion that knowledge is more certain than belief is shown by the frequency of the expressions, 'I do not merely believe it; I know it,' and in reply to questions, 'I believe so, but I am not sure.' In answer to this, I point to the fact that inquiry into the nature of belief and knowledge is rare even in psychology and philosophy, and never perceived to be needed by the great majority. Inaccuracy of speech is to be expected when the speaker has never paid attention to what is spoken of.

I extract the following from *Knowledge, Belief, and Certitude* (page 468), referring to that work for the investigation of the mental facts upon which the conclusions are based. 'Summing up these conclusions we observe (1) that belief and knowledge both are intelligent apprehensions of reality; (2) belief is the mind's acceptance of, resting in, and acting upon the real which is given in, or manifested to consciousness; (3) knowledge is mental vision or judgment of the character, marks, composition, behaviour of the real thing; (4) all knowledge is belief; (5) to distinguish knowledge altogether from belief is impossible, but there is a difference between a belief which we do not

call knowledge, and a belief which [is also [called] knowledge. In the one case we feel and own our inability to give a full and perfect definition of the thing believed; or it may be, to give any account of it whatever, other than that it exists. In the other case, there is a more or less closely approximate description of the thing, which may pass current as positive knowledge; but in reality there are no perfect definitions in our knowledge. Most important is it, for the understanding of belief and knowledge as they really are, to grasp firmly the fact that they are names of a unity: the one living, feeling, thinking mind, apprehending and responding to the reality in which it lives.'

NOTE B TO PAGE 12.

'Consciousness never deceives,' it is said. We misinterpret our feelings; but the feeling themselves are given facts; they are what they are, and cannot appear otherwise. But is this universally true? If it were we could not interpret with the firm assurance which common sense and science display. Nevertheless there seem to be exceptions. Take dreams, for instance. In these we see and hear; although afterwards when awake we are sure that the sights and sounds were unreal. When awake and not moving a limb or muscle we feel at rest: although we are moving with the diurnal and annual motions of the globe. Men who have had a leg cut off have afterwards felt pain in the foot, although the foot is no longer there.

These instances suffice to show that we cannot claim absolute infallibility even for immediately given feelings. Experience teaches us that our feelings are in a great number of cases trustworthy. But immediate feeling, as the phrase just used indicates, is no exception to the rule that all knowledge is belief.

NOTE C TO PAGE 41.

‘Their religion was and is to them certainly true. A critic remarks—‘They thought so, but was it always true?’ In explanation, I observe that my proposition does not say that the religious people were perfectly clear in their own minds as to what they believed, nor that what they believed was objectively real. It hardly needs to be said that I do not affirm the truth of polytheism, of the obligation of human sacrifices, etc. : the succeeding chapter on Comparative Religion deals with such facts. On page 49 I define religion as ‘belief in a Being or a number of Beings to which the religious feelings refer.’ Polytheists believe in ‘gods many and lords many;’ and to them the belief is an assurance that these divinities exist. We may believe that their belief is false; but if we condemn their belief as absolutely false, we go beyond our warrant. Assuming that the polytheist has never heard of monotheism, and that the only conception he has of Deity is polytheistic, then polytheism is his nearest approximation to the real Deity. Were he to reject

this conception he would be an atheist. His polytheistic belief involves the belief that there is *some* being partially revealed and partially concealed by the environment, and this is certainly true objectively as well as for him ; though it falls short of the higher conception of monotheism. And monotheism too is only an approximation to the reality of God ; for God is incomprehensible, and a perfect conception of Him is beyond our reach. The varying stages of moral development are similar approximations. Savage, or semi-civilized, tribes have felt under moral obligations to members of their own tribe ; but none to outsiders. To kill or rob or enslave members of other tribes seemed to them permissible, or even meritorious. Shocking as this seems to us, we must nevertheless recognise that the savage morality is true as far as it goes : it is better to love one's neighbours and hate one's enemies than to hate both neighbours and enemies. The good is only hostile to the best, when both being known the good is chosen and the best rejected.

NOTE D TO PAGE 55.

‘These illustrations are liable to be misunderstood : the thunder is not God’s voice, in the sense in which some people have taken it to be this.’ So my critic warns me ; and I take the opportunity of admitting that we must not unduly press the analogy between the manifestations of a human soul by glances, words,

gestures, etc., and the manifestation of the Deity in our physical environment. In poetry, the visible and tangible world may be described as the 'vesture' or the 'body' of God; but we have no right to assert this as dogmatic truth. We must not think that the visible universe manifests God as a man's body manifests his soul. Indeed, the relation between soul and body, their unity and their difference, are mysteries passing our comprehension. That the universe as a whole is a revelation of the Deity is a certainty; but if we select some parts of the universe as special manifestations and overlook other parts we are in danger of misrepresenting Him. The human spirit itself is perhaps, at least to us, a truer and fuller manifestation than the material universe. In some way, to some extent, God is in every man, but He is especially present in prophets, saints, martyrs, and in an unique manner in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the manifestation in inorganic nature is impressive and important. Hence we receive the concepts of power, order, stability, regularity and permanence. The beauty and sublimity of nature are means whereby the Divine Presence is felt; and the supply of man's bodily wants by bounteous harvests is another token to us of the Divine Goodness.


NOTE E TO PAGE 63

'God himself bears all the pain and sorrow which exists in His world;' and it might be added, He

suffers all the sin and wickedness which his erring and rebellious children commit against Him. Is this belief too bold? Does it imply anything unworthy of the Infinite Benevolence which must be Perfect Happiness? I would in profoundest reverence acknowledge my firm belief that God is incomprehensible by the human intellect; and that therefore we ought not presumptuously to insist upon our inevitably anthropomorphic conceptions of His character and being.

Yet the expressions of belief which have been uttered seem to be supported by the Omniscience and Omnipresence which we attribute to Him. Can we imagine God seeing and knowing the sufferings of the children whom He loves *without* feeling for them and with them? When we conceive Him as the Source and Author of all power everywhere, so that not an atom moves without His moving it, how can we have strength to endure pain except as He imparts of His strength to us—which seems to be just the same as saying that He endures what we endure? It seems to me that the truth of Pantheism requires us to think of God as the All, and as in every being that lives, and in all the life and activity of every being, except in so far as the finite being sets its will against the Infinite and Perfect Will. And this evil will in man is not something that exists outside God, in another universe where He does not enter; but it is in God, and against God, and grieves

His holy Spirit: and He bears the infliction of this evil that He may overcome it by the omnipotence of His incomprehensible Love. This seems to me the meaning of Jesus Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. But how should a human mind presume to define God to perfection?



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